MEMORY, THE PAST AND THE USE OF QUOTATIONS IN GIACOMO LEOPARDI'S *ZIBALDONE*

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Abstract

The work examines the interweavement of individual memory and historical past in Giacomo Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, arguing that the genre of this 'non-book' can be identified with the ancient Greek notion of *hypomnēmaton*. The first section reads the *Zibaldone* as an answer to the so called 'second printing revolution', examining the text as the outcome of tension between the 'library' and Leopardi's own writing. The second section analyses Leopardi's use of quotations through the case study of Montesquieu's presence in the *Zibaldone*, highlighting how quotations from Montesquieu shape Leopardi's reflection on the fracture between antiquity and modernity and on the aesthetic problem of grace. The third section moves from the poem 'Le Ricordanze' (1829), showing how the questions challenged in the *Zibaldone* from a theoretical point of view (such as the relationship between individual memory and historical past, the notion of grace and the problem of making culture after the Enlightenment) are finally embodied in Leopardi's return to poetry of 1828-29, which makes the *Zibaldone-hypomnēmaton* unnecessary. 'Le Ricordanze' stages an unmediated return of memory (*mnēme*) through which the *hypomnēmaton* is ultimately emptied of significance.

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INTRODUCTION

Pisa-Recanati, 1828-29

On 5 September 1829 Leopardi writes from Recanati to Karl Bunsen, who at the time was the Rome-based Prussian minister:

> Mio padre, il quale ama d'immaginarsi che nella *casa paterna* io stia meglio che altrove, le ha dato del mio stato un'idea ben diversa dal vero. Non solo i miei occhi, ma tutto il mio fisico, sono in istato peggiore che fosse mai. Non posso nè scrivere nè leggere nè dettare nè pensare. Questa lettera, finchè non l'avrò terminata, sarà la mia sola occupazione […]. *Condannato*, per mancanza di mezzi, *a quest'orribile e detestata dimora*, e già morto ad ogni godimento e ad ogni speranza, non vivo che per patire, e non invoco che il riposo del sepolcro. (emphasis mine)[1]

In talking about his father's house, Leopardi was employing an expression that was interestingly close to the one he had used while writing to his publisher Stella, a few days before, on 26 August: 'La mia salute è in un misero stato, e la mia vita è un purgatorio. *In quest'orrido e detestato soggiorno*, non ho più altra consolazione che ricordarmi degli amici passati' (emphasis mine).[2] With the sort of detachment of those who feel close to death, Leopardi speaks of himself as of an already ghostly creature, who is fighting against oblivion: 'Mi conservi Ella l'amor suo finché vivo, e mi raccomandi alla memoria de' suoi'.[3]

Through these reciprocal reverberations, the two letters are meaningful, since in the very same days – from 26 August to 12 September – Leopardi composes 'Le Ricordanze', a poem that uses precisely the physical and emotive space of the 'casa paterna' as the battery of

[1] Giacomo Leopardi, *Epistolario*, ed. by Franco Brioschi and Patrizia Landi, 2 vols. (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 1998), vol. II, pp. 1686-87 (from now on *E*).
[2] *E*, vol. II, p. 1681.
[3] Ibid.

memory from which poetry springs out. In these days, it seems as if Leopardi's writing was progressively refined and crystallised by the totalising dimension of poetry, which suppresses every other form of expression. Letters become scarce. After September the 5th, Leopardi responds briefly, on the 23rd, to his friend Antonietta Tommasini, and two days later he even asks his sister to reply to Gian Pietro Vieusseux, adducing reasons of health.[4] In the same month, the so-called 'elenchi di letture', which have progressively become laconic since April, are interrupted, showing how reading – or at least the meticulous registration of read books – has become a superfluous activity.[5] Finally and most interestingly, on 5 September, Leopardi drafts in the *Zibaldone*, the intellectual journal that he had been keeping since 1817, a quotation, without comments, from Cicero's *De Officiis*. To some extent, the writing laboratory inaugurated twelve years before stops here: in 1829 Leopardi will draft no further entries in the *Zibaldone*, and in the following years the journal witnesses only a few fragments, drafted between 1830 and 1832, that nevertheless occupy no more than three pages. In the meantime, after the 'Ricordanze', Leopardi composes – one after the other – 'La quiete dopo la tempesta' (17-20 September), 'Il sabato del villaggio' (29 September) and, on 22 October, the first draft of the 'Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia', later completed in April1830.

The return to poetry of the early autumn of 1829 is hence to be framed within a return home that Leopardi perceives first of all as a defeat, which is at the same time human, literary and existential, and that extinguishes every other form of writing. Several years before, in July 1821, Leopardi had drafted in the *Zibaldone* a plan of action aimed to 'scuotere la mia povera

[4] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1697.

[5] In September 1829 Leopardi records only the poem *Amor fuggitivo* by Torquato Tasso, one of the most influential authors in the composition of the 'Ricordanze'. Leopardi will only recuperate his habit of drafting 'elenchi di letture' in 1830, cf. Giacomo Leopardi, *Tutte le poesie e tutte le prose*, ed. by Lucio Felici and Emanuele Trevi (Rome: Newton, 1997), p. 1122 (from now on *TPP*, followed by page number).

patria, e secolo': he delineated there a naïve self-representation as a complete intellectual, equally able to employ

> le armi dell'affetto e dell'entusiasmo e dell'eloquenza e dell'immaginazione nella lirica, e in quelle prose letterarie ch'io potrò scrivere; le armi della ragione, della logica, della filosofia, ne' Trattati filosofici ch'io dispongo; e le armi del ridicolo ne' dialoghi e novelle Lucianee ch'io vo preparando. (*Zibaldone*, p. 1394, 27 July 1821)[6]

The project still corresponded to the ideal of a synthesis between two opposite ideals of intellectual action that Leopardi still hoped to conciliate. The first was his uncle Carlo Antici's, who since 1814 had directed him to the study of the classics, with the purpose of acquiring an 'eloquence' that had to be translated into civil and moral action.[7] The other was the one to which Leopardi had been guided since 1818 by Pietro Giordani, who saw Leopardi as the prototype of a new kind of Italian intellectual, in which the entire national heritage could be subsumed. Both expectations had been eluded, or, better, elsewhere addressed. The abandonment of poetry in the late 1820s had corresponded to a determined choice for prose, meticulously trained within the *Zibaldone*, in which literary and civil engagement was inextricably linked with the prospective entrance into the Bourbon Restoration's social beau monde. The heart of this cultural project were the *Operette morali*, as an aftermath of the 'dialoghi e novelle Lucianee' already envisaged in 1821, and their ideal corollary was the *Crestomazia de' prosatori*. The two works were specular, in that both proposed an intellectual renovation grounded in language, one in the form of *morceaux choisis* from the national literary tradition proposed as paragons in style, and the other in a fresh demonstration of that

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[6] I quote the *Zibaldone* from the latest CD-Rom edition of the manuscript by Fiorenza Ceragioli and Monica Ballerini (Bologna: Zanichelli, 2009; from now on *Zib.*, followed by page number and date).

[7] Cf. Franco D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce. Leopardi, Platone e il libro morale* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009), pp. 85-93.

very style. Both attempts culminated in a shipwreck. The *Crestomazia* had been welcomed with a sort of embarrassed discretion. Leopardi's reaction shows a mixture of disappointment and disdain. On 25 February he writes to Antonio Papadopoli that, 'Con questa razza di giudizio e di critica che si trova oggi in Italia, coglione chi si affatica a pensare e a scrivere. […] Una raccolta delle mie traduzioni dal greco,' he concludes, 'mi è stata anche fatta proporre da un libraio della Marca. Non so se avrò voglia di darmene pensiero'.[8] In a letter of 5 May to Pietro Giordani, Leopardi makes his disappointment more explicit: 'se negli studi potessi seguire ancora il mio genio, veduta la qualità dei giudizi di questo secolo, non mi darebbe più il cuore di logorarmi in far cose che mi contentassero'.[9] The *Operette* were to meet an even worse fate. On 13 February 1830, Vieusseux informed Leopardi that his book had not been awarded the prize announced by the Crusca Academy. Leopardi's reaction was desperate and decisive: 'Son risoluto', he replied on 21 March, '[…] di pormi in viaggio per cercar salute o morire, e a Recanati non ritornare mai più'.[10] This is precisely what Leopardi will do, leaving forever on April the 30th.

Between these chronological and intellectual confines, however, Leopardi's poetry blossoms again, although in a radically different form than that of the 'liriche' projected in 1821. On the very same day 25 February 1828 in which he wrote to Papadopoli that 'Studiare e lavorare, sono cose che ho dimenticate, e dalle quali divengo alieno ogni giorno di più',[11] sends to his sister Paolina a very famous letter:

Io sogno sempre di voi altri, dormendo e vegliando: ho qui in Pisa una certa strada deliziosa, che io chiamo *Via delle Rimembranze*; là vo a passeggiare quando voglio sognare a occhi

[8] *E*, vol. II, p. 1460 .
[9] Ibid., vol. II, pp. 1481-82.
[10] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1719.
[11] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1460.

aperti. Vi assicuro che in materia d'immaginazioni, mi pare di esser tornato al mio buon tempo antico.[12]

Similarly, three days before his letter to Giordani of 3 May, he writes, again to Paolina, that 'dopo due anni, ho fatto dei versi quest'aprile; ma versi veramente all'antica, e con quel mio cuore di una volta'.[13] Leopardi refers to 'A Silvia', composed in the space of two days between the 19th and the 20th April.

Within the space of circa one month, and speaking about the way in which the anamnestic regression has brought him to an unexpected return to poetry, Leopardi employs twice, in his letter, the term 'antico', which for him is always (as we will see) the clue for a subterranean tension between history and memory. The return to the 'buon tempo antico' that generates and inspires 'versi […] all'antica' describes, in a willingly ambiguous way, an existential rebirth, which substitutes, in place of the sedentary and rational domain of 'studiare e lavorare', the oscillating movement of strolling and day-dreaming. As a city, Pisa propitiates this sort of *flânerie*, and in his letters Leopardi – as he usually does – evokes the weather when alluding to an inner state. In the enthusiasm of his first days in Pisa, on 27 December 1827 Leopardi writes to his father that in Pisa he can promenade, which in Recanati is impossible: in Recanati it often rains or it is windy, and on bright days there is no shadow to give shelter, while Pisa has a mild climate, and seasons are organised in a delicate equilibrium that never turns into excess.[14] This praise is meaningful, especially since it comes from the one who, in the 'Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese' of the *Operette* (1824), had enumerated the manifold ways in which Nature is able to torment men on various latitudes: 'sono stato arso dal caldo fra i tropici, rappreso dal freddo verso i poli, afflitto nei climi temperati

[12] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1459.
[13] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1480.
[14] Ibid., vol. II, pp. 1437-38.

dall'incostanza dell'aria, infestato dalle commozioni degli elementi in ogni dove'. Pisa represents therefore, somehow, the state of calm that the Icelander had been searching in vain, and that in Recanati was only possible within the enclosed space of the library: 'Io le invidio', writes Leopardi to his father on 29 July 1828, 'il soggiorno della Libreria, nella quale mi ricordo bene di non aver mai conosciuta l'estate nè sentito molto l'inverno'.[15]

Pisa differs from Recanati also from the point of view of urban space. Having arrived in the city, on 12 November 1827, Leopardi employs three times, in three different letters, the same expressions: 'Pisa è un misto di città grande e di città piccola, di cittadino e di villereccio, un misto […] romantico';[16] 'trovo […] un certo misto di città grande e di città piccola, di cittadino e di villereccio, un misto veramente romantico';[17] 'io trovo qui un misto di città grande e di città piccola, di cittadino e di rustico, tanto nelle cose, quanto nelle persone: un misto propriamente romantico'.[18] Leopardi's use of the adjective 'romantico' is eloquent. His correspondents were perhaps not able to catch the allusions, but Leopardi was probably anticipating an acceptation of this adjective that he would have lucidly made explicit in the following autumn, in Florence:

> Perchè il moderno, il nuovo, non è mai, o ben difficilm. romantico; e l'*antico*, il vecchio, al contrario? Perchè quasi tutti i piaceri dell'immaginaz. e del sentim. consistono in rimembranza. Che è come dire che stanno nel passato anzi che nel presente. (*Zib.* 4415, 22 October 1828, emphasis mine)

Pisa's 'misto […] romantico' is therefore connected to the dimension of memory. The space perceived by Leopardi in November 1827 is a liminal one, torn between town and city, as well as between the present and the past. To walk in the *Via delle Rimembranze* enacts

[15] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1528.
[16] To Paolina, ibid., vol. II, p. 1400.
[17] To Adelaide Maestri, ibid., vol. II, p. 1401.
[18] To Vieusseux, ibid., vol. II, p. 1402.

therefore a tension between closeness and distantiation, through which one's own past can be obliquely grasped and crystallised within poetic speech.

The same tension between familiarity and otherness underlies the 'Ricordanze', transferred however from the domain of space to that of time. The Leopardi who returns to the 'casa paterna' is no longer the one who left it: in between, there stand his own existential and literary defeat, his brother Luigi's death of 3 May 1829, and the forced detachment from the lively and international beau monde of Tuscany. A few months before writing his poem, in March 1829, Leopardi wrote to General Pietro Colletta about his own literary projects: one of these was the 'Storia di un'anima', meant to be a novel in which 'poche avventure estrinseche e […] delle più ordinarie' corresponded to the 'vicende interne di un animo nobile e tenero, dal tempo delle sue prime *ricordanze* fino alla morte' (emphasis mine); another one was a 'Colloquio dell'io antico e dell'io nuovo; cioè di quello che io fui, con quello che io sono; dell'uomo anteriore all'esperienza della vita e dell'uomo sperimentato'.[19] Both projects find their ultimate concretisation in the 'Ricordanze'. In re-activating the mythical theme of *nostos*, 'Le Ricordanze' show Leopardi's return home as a confrontation of a grown-up subject with the illusions of his youth, bitterly declaring a loss of innocence.

Both 'A Silvia' and 'Le Ricordanze' arise therefore from failure, within a fluid and instable moment in which the Recanati of Leopardi's youth is at the same time the 'detestato' place of the letters to Bunsen and Stella, and the catalyst of memory that becomes almost immediately poetic speech. Both poems seem to have been written in a state of trance, and for their author only. Between February and April 1828, while 'A Silvia' is plausibly emerging in his consciousness, Leopardi notes in the *Zibaldone* that poetry has no public or civil use, and

[19] Ibid., vol. II, p. 1634.

that the only addressee of poetry is probably its own author who, without bothering about others' judgement, can re-read himself and confront 'l'io antico e [l']io nuovo':

> Uno de' maggiori frutti che io mi propongo e spero da' miei versi, è che essi riscaldino la mia *vecchiezza* col calore della mia *gioventù*; è di assaporarli in quella età, e provar *qualche reliquia* die' miei sentimen~~ti~~ passati, messa quivi entro, per *conservarla* e *darle durata*, *quasi in deposito*; è di *commuover me stesso* in rileggerli, come spesso mi accade, e meglio che in leggere poesie d'altri: il riflettere sopra quello ch'io fui, e paragonarmi meco medesimo; e in fine il piacere che si prova in gustare e apprezzare i propri lavori, e contemplare da se, compiacendosene, le bellezze e i pregi di un figliuolo proprio, non con altra soddisfazione, che di aver fatta una cosa bella al mondo; sia essa o non sia conosciuta p. tale da altrui. (*Zib.* 4302, 15 April 1828)

Both poems are perceived as something sudden and unexpected, and welcomed with a mixture of surprise and wonder. In writing to his sister about having 'fatto dei versi quest'aprile; ma versi veramente all'antica, e con quel mio cuore di una volta', Leopardi seems to highlight the naïve, astonishment about a return to poetry that he believed to be almost impossible. The same sense of wonder is incorporated within the beginning of 'Ricordanze': 'Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa, io non credea / di tornare ancor per uso a contemplarvi' (ll. 1-2). In a moment of crisis and defeat, poetry seems therefore to emerge outside of the subject's control, establishing a fissure between a 'before' and an 'after'. On one side is Leopardi's youth, corresponding to an intentional self-construction as a philologist, poet, philosopher: they are years made of reading, writing, experiments and literary drafts, conceived within the *Zibaldone* as a laboratory, an interlocutor and a palimpsest. On the other side is Leopardi's final escape from Recanati, the 1831 edition of the *Canti* (aprile 1831) and the Neapolitan years, in which poetry almost remains the only medium of expression, reaching a radical and paradoxical mixture of poetic lightness and philosophical-philological density. 'A Silvia' and 'Le Ricordanze' can be considered as the moment of tension between these two poles: the moment in which memory, history and the library collide in the form of a

completely new kind of poetry. At this stage, the complex archaeology constructed in the *Zibaldone* must be dissolved.

Palimpsest, Hypomnēmata *and the Demonic*

In this work, I analyse precisely how the *Zibaldone* is constructed as the laboratory for a both individual and collective archaeology, in which the domains of memory, history and the library shift and superimpose each other, oscillating between written culture and the extra-visual domain of recollection and emotion. Let us consider a passage that appears in the sixty-fifth page of the *Zibaldone*:

> Diceva una volta mia madre a Pietrino che piangeva per una cannuccia gittatagli per la finestra da Luigi: non piangere non piangere che a ogni modo ce l'avrei gittata io~~,~~. E quegli si consolava perché anche in altro ceaso l'avrebbe perduta. Osservazioni intorno a questo effetto comunissimo negli uomini, e a quell'altro suo affine, cioè che noi ci consoliamo e ci diamo pace quando ci persuadiamo che quel bene ~~e~~non ~~è~~era in nostra balìa d'ottenerlo, nè quel male di schivarlo, e però cerchiamo di persuadercene, e non potendo, siamo disperati, quantunque il male in otutti i modi si rimanga lo stesso. v. p. 188. v. a questo proposito il Manuale di Epitteto.

External information allows us to date the main core of this fragment to 1819.[20] Two subsequent writing phases intervene however within the manuscript. One can be dated with confidence to 26-28 July 1820, when Leopardi tore out page 188, and likely returned to this

[20] Cf. the hypothesis for a dating of the first hundred pages of the *Zibaldone* proposed by Giuseppe Pacella, in Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, ed. by Giuseppe Pacella, 3 vols. (Milan: Garzanti, 1991), vol. I, p. xiv. As it is well known, Leopardi starts dating his *Zibaldone* fragments on 8 January 1820, having reached the page n. 100 of the manuscript. On the role of dates in the *Zibaldone*, see Fabiana Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone'. Il tempo circolare della scrittura di Leopardi* (Rome: Donzelli, 2010), pp. 63-66. Carlo Ossola has spoken of the religious-devout structure of a 'livre d'heures': 'Leopardi: préludes et passions', in *La Conscience de soi de la poésie*, ed. by Yves Bonnefoy (Paris: Seuil, 2008), pp. 235-268. I will deal more closely with the religious and mythical implications of the 'hours' in the last section of the present dissertation.

original fragment in order to establish a connection through an internal reference. The other can be plausibly situated in the fall or winter of 1825, when Leopardi was in Bologna and completed to his 'volgarizzamento' – namely, a translation from Greek into Italian, which is thus defined as a 'vernacular' tongue – of Epictetus's *Enchiridion*, a 'manuale di filosofia pratica' from the early second century.[21] From this perspective, the *Zibaldone* reveals the stratification of a palimpsest, a philological notion that in Bourbon Restoration Italy had been widely popularised by the discoveries of Angelo Mai, to whom Leopardi himself would dedicate a song in 1820.[22] In Romantic criticism and beyond, however, the notion of palimpsest becomes, as Robert Douglas-Fairhurst writes, 'the self-reflexive home for diverse models of psychological, historical, and social integration, and poetic shorthand for a shadowy archaeology of memory and desire'.[23] The palimpsest-like structure provides a powerful allegory for conceptualising the scattered and fragmentary memory of the post-Enlightenment historicised subject:

> Dato che la memoria non è unica o semplice (*einfach*), bensì molteplice (*mehrfach*), a ogni epoca subentra un nuovo genere di memoria, che riscrive e ricolloca i vissuti trascorsi. […] Nel corso dell'esistenza ciascuno sperimenta quindi differenti versioni di se stesso, che

[21] The expression 'manuale di filosofia pratica' comes from a list of literary draft plausibly drawn out in 1829, in which Leopardi plans to write a 'Manuale di filosofia pratica: cioè un Epitteto a mio modo' (*TPP*, p. 1112): I discuss this project above.

[22] On the notion of palimpsest in the nineteenth century and its relationship with questions of continuity and literary survival see Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives. The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 147. Douglas-Fairhurst quotes C.W. Russell's essay 'Palimpsest Literature and its Editor, Cardinal Angelo Mai' (1867), in which palimpsests are defined as the 'spirits of a departed literature'. Equally, in Leopardi's *canzone*, the volume of Cicero's *Republic* edited by Mai is praised with images of exhumation, spectral continuity and the haunting of the ancients' voices: 'svegliar dale tombe / i nostri padri' (ll. 2-3), 'parlar / a questo secol morto' (3-4), 'voce antica de' nostri / muta sì lunga etade' (7-8). Mai has awakened 'i generosi e santi / detti degli avi' (12-13) that had remained 'occulti' (12) in the 'polverosi chiostri' (11). For a first profile of Angelo Mai and of his relationship with Leopardi cf. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2008), pp. 24-41.

[23] Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, p. 148.

includono brani non tradotti nel linguaggio degli strati successive. Ogni individuo risulta così 'dividuo', attraversato da faglie e fessure. Sviluppando la metafora della scrittura, somiglia a un palinsesto continuamente raschiato e ricoperto di nuovi strati di segni, di cui – finché è vivo – non esiste alcuna *editio princeps*.[24]

The three subsequent interventions which actually constitute the fragment of *Zib.* 65 delineate therefore an emotional and intellectual archaeology, structuring the eventual shape of the passage as we read it today. Through the articulation of a wavy movement that hideously takes place both *within* and *across* the text, the interaction of these three sub-fragments can be considered as an example and a paradigm of Leopardi's writing laboratory. The first draft moves from the account of an individual recollection to an ethical reflection: in its first shape, the fragment is meant as a quick note that announces further 'osservazioni', plausibly to be elaborated in the future. With the first addition, the terse definition of such an 'effetto comunissimo negli uomini' is constructed as an internal cross-reference within the *Zibaldone* itself, thus enacting an inner dialogue with other *loci* the text. Eventually, the whole reflection is linked to Epictetus's *Enchiridion* as to an *auctoritas* to which the reader is addressed: the recollection of a personal anecdote and the subsequent broadening of the perspective to the domain of ethics are brought back to an ancient text, thus engendering a double movement. On the one hand, the authority of Epictetus's book supports Leopardi's statement, which is therefore inscribed within a tradition that goes back to ancient ethics. On the other, the anecdote sheds indirect light onto the *Enchiridion*, implicitly reaffirming its topicality and thus affording it an immobilised textual tradition with the support of experience. The fragment enacts a dialogue in which textuality and individual experience are reciprocally interfaced.

[24] Remo Bodei, *Le logiche del delirio. Ragione, affetti, follia* (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 2000), pp. 6-7.

Speaking from a literary theoretical perspective, the reference to Epictetus corresponds to the form of quotation that Antoine Compagnon, in *La seconde main*, defines as 'symbol' (*symbole*). By establishing a taxonomy of quoting practices on the model of Charles S. Peirce's logic, Compagnon proposes to consider quotation as a sign that relates to an object, thus interpreting the 'symbol' as 'référant à l'objet, auquel cas il le *signifie*'.[25] Anywhere no form of embodiment-exhibition is at stake (as in the case of the quotation-*icône*), nor any designative relationship (as happens with the paraphrase-*indice*), 'symbol' is the form that structures references and footnotes. The relationship is granted by a convention established between the text, the other text and the interpreter, thus ensuring the rules of a 'symbolic' connection. The quick allusion to Epictetus's handbook, without the provision of any specific passage or reference, shows the fragment as an internal note which anticipates further elaborations.

In the analysed case, however, reference appears to be more complex and stratified. This happens first of all because Epictetus's *Handbook* is a text that Leopardi translated directly. In his preface to the 'volgarizzamento', Leopardi clarifies that his translation is not dictated by any historicist or philological reasons whatsoever, but by the acknowledgment of an applicability of the very Stoic thought within modernity. 'Ridotto quasi mal mio grado', Leopardi writes, 'a praticare per abito il predetto insegnamento, […] tuttavia [ne] riporto una utilità incredibile', and 'desidero e prego caldamente a tutti quelli che leggeranno […] la facoltà di porlo medesimamente ad esecuzione'.[26]

The appropriation determined by the very act of translating corresponds therefore to an intellectual embodiment, which firmly encompasses the Stoic precepts within Leopardi's own

[25] Antoine Compagnon, *La seconde main ou le travail de la citation* (Paris: Seuil, 1979), p. 63.
[26] *TPP*, pp. 1074-75.

thought and ethical reflection: not by chance, in his 'disegni letterari', Leopardi would later schedule a 'Manuale di filosofia pratica: cioè un Epitteto a mio modo'.[27] This move is, as we have seen, implicit in the *Zibaldone* fragment: the relationship with Epictetus's 'ancient' text is not grounded in distantiation, following a historicist paradigm, but rather in a revitalisation of textual tradition through the interaction with individual experience. The fragment is therefore eloquent insofar as it juxtaposes a scrap of 'episodic memory' to the 'semantic memory' of the reference from Epictetus, in an osmotic and undistinguishable interface of emotional reminiscences and of learned memory ('memoria dotta').[28] This example shows therefore the ambiguous and suffused role of quotation, bending its apparent alterity to the most subterranean and intimate veins of Leopardi's intellectual endeavour. The expression 'a mio modo' of the literary draft shows how the relationship with the *auctoritates* is problematised by Leopardi as a personal and creative engagement, by which tradition can be reassessed and brought back into life.

The most inner core of the *Zibaldone* as a laboratory can thus be identified in a set of relations, through which heterogeneous materials generate a surplus of meaning as far as they are inscribed and embodied within the interweavement articulated by the text. The example of *Zib.* 65 is widely elucidative: the individual recollection turns immediately into philosophical reflection, subsequently connecting itself to the ravelling of the internal argumentation and ultimately alluding to Epictetus's learned memory. These separate mechanisms are however

[27] *TPP*, 1112.

[28] The distinction between 'semantic memory' and 'episodic memory' was introduced by Endel Tulving in 1972: 'Episodic and semantic memory', in *Organization of Memory*, ed. by Endel Tulving and Wayne Donaldson (New York: Academic Press, 1972), pp. 381-402. The semantic memory is related to language and concerns what belongs to the domain of culture and knowledge (*Dizionario della memoria e del ricordo*, ed. by Nicholas Pethes and Jens Ruchatz [Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2002], p. 330), while the episodic memory is connected with feelings and collects personal experiences (ibid., p. 323). For the definition of 'memoria dotta', which is more connoted in a philological and intertextual sense, see Gian Biagio Conte, *Memoria dei poeti e sistema letterario* (Turin: Einaudi, 1974), p. 10.

symptomatically analogous from a structural point of view. On the one hand, the single recollection undergoes a process of extrapolation from the continuum of memory, and is hence constructed as an exemplary object. In other words, memory is not valid by itself, but as far as it can be taken as a starting point for the universalising operation of philosophical analysis. On the other hand, quotation is extracted from its proper context, being what I choose to call the 'Library' as a form of storage, structuration and ordering of culture, and thereby constructed as a paradigmatic example. As Michel Foucault writes, nineteenth-century literature

> avait son lieu hautement temporal dans l'espace à la fois réel et fantastique de la Bibliothèque; là, chaque livre était fait pour reprendre tous les autres, les consumer, les réduire au silence et finalement venir s'installer à côté d'eux, – hors d'eux et au milieu d'eux (Sade et Mallarmé avec leurs livres, avec Le Livre, sont par définition l'Enfer des Bibliothèques).[29]

In the specific case of Leopardi, 'library' can firstly be meant in a physical sense: it would thus refer to the Recanati one, meant as the visible form of the sets of knowledge that shape Leopardi's intellectual profile in his formational years. As Fabiana Cacciapuoti writes, 'il desiderio della conoscenza […] può realizzarsi proprio nella biblioteca, primo tramite del rapporto tra Monaldo e Giacomo, ma soprattutto luogo davvero deputato alla sistemazione dei saperi', in which 'classici e moderni, non considerati solo come contrapposti nell'ambito della nota *querelle*, diventano strumenti di una elaborazione che si manifesta appunto nelle pagine dello *Zibaldone*'.[30] As Giuseppe Pacella has shown, the first hundred pages of the *Zibaldone*, in which the structure of the book is progressively and unwillingly constructed, precisely

[29] Michel Foucault, 'Distance, aspect, origine', in Tel Quel, *Théorie d'ensemble* (Paris: Seuil, 1968), pp. 11-24, p. 17.
[30] Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone'*, pp. 8-10.

proceeds along a set of readings made in the Recanati library.[31] 'Library' can nevertheless be also intended in a mental and cultural sense, using it as a metaphor for both the net of references operating underneath Leopardi's writing, and for the Canon as a set of hierarchies of knowledge that Leopardi assimilates and reassesses.

This process of (more or less willingly) violent extraction, and concurrent reintegration of the extrapolated fragment within a new order, was lucidly conceptualised by Giorgio Agamben in relation to Walter Benjamin's use of quotations. In Benjamin, 'alienating by force a fragment of the past from its historical context, the quotation at once makes it lose its character of authentic testimony and invests it with an alienating power that constitutes its unmistakable aggressive force'.[32] This consideration can be widened to Western cultural modernity as a whole, in which – again speaking in Benjamin's terms – the 'alienating power' of the isolated quotation can be seen as a response to a wider alienation, following a shock that involves both the domains of subjectivity and of cultural tradition. The fragmentariness of the *Zibaldone* (in a similar way to that of Benjamin's later *Arcades Project*) would be the answer to the shock posed by modernity in relation to problems of identity, continuity, and change: the fragmented subjectivity of the post-Enlightenment age is conceptualised as a fragmented, palimpsest-like textuality, while the 'Library' – after the so-called 'second printing revolution' – cannot be anymore grasped, unless through fragmentation and a stratified re-contextualisation. Recollection and quotation (or, in other words, autobiographical and semantic memory) can therefore be reactivated only once they have been isolated and alienated with respect to their legitimate domains, and concurrently re-inserted within a new form of writing. At the same time, within their new contextualisation

[31] Ibid., p. 41.
[32] Giorgio Agamben, 'The Melancholy Angel', in Id., *The Man Without Content*, transl. by Georgia Albert (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), pp. 104-115, p. 104.

they interact with the new writing's inner elaboration, with its implicit or explicit veins of argumentation.

The re-contextualisation of a double memory, either individual and cultural, operates – as it is clear – a restructuration as well as a re-semantisation of the past. Robert Douglas-Fairhurst assimilates modern historicist quotation policy to psychoanalysis, where both are forms of reassessment of the past for the purpose of pacification. Borrowing a definition from Freud's notion of symptom, intertextual fragments can be seen as 'after-images of [old] thoughts' which 'trouble new perceptions'.[33] In the same way, the neurotic symptom, as Freud acknowledges when witnessing the hysterics at the Salpêtrière, is the symbolisation of a past trauma, a sort of allusion-'symbol' (to speak in Compagnon's terms) which has to be interpreted by the analyst-reader, and reassessed within the continuum of memory. With Freud, writes Georges Didi-Huberman, 'le symptôme hysterique cesse […] de dépendre d'une iconographie […]. Dans ce "corps mû en image" […], dans ce fouillis de mouvements désordonnés, Freud, en effet, a su reconnaître une structure exemplaire', providing an 'admirable leçon de regard'.[34] According to Freud's studies on hysteria of the 1890s, the hysterical symptom is articulated on a concurrent process of 'dissociation', through which the traumatic 'impression' is disjointed from its symptomatic outcome, and of a 'return of the buried' ('*retour de l'enfoui*'), 'un élément de mémoire inconsciente, tenace et pétrifié comme un fossile, [qui] resurgit à la surface au profit de quelque cause occasionelle'.[35] This double process of abstraction (from the original trauma to its symbolisation) and of reification/concretisation (of symbolisation into symptom) corresponds to the double

[33] Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, p. 37.
[34] Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante. Histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 2002), pp. 296-97. See the whole section on 'L'image-symptôme' for a strict analyisis of the notion of 'symptom' between Freud and Warburg (pp. 271-514).
[35] Ibid., p. 338.

movement of excerption and displacement that characterises the rhetorical structure of metaphor, so that, as Jacques Lacan puts it, 'the symptom *is* a metaphor, whether one likes to admit it or not, just as desire *is* a metonymy, even if man scoffs at the idea'.[36] The presence itself of the 'fragment' – be it allusion-'symbol', symptom-metaphor or 'after-imag[e] of [an old] though[t]' is therefore, as Slavoj Žižek writes, a 'return of the living dead' which is 'the reverse of the proper funeral rite. While the latter', Žižek continues, 'implies a certain reconciliation, an acceptance of loss, the return of the dead signifies that they cannot find their proper place in the text of tradition'.[37] Symptomatology and intertextuality share hence an analogous structure, in being both results of a troubling process of abstraction, concretisation and symbolisation in which 'dead' (feelings, texts) are conjured.[38] Quoting is therefore, and at the same time, a therapeutic, historical and demonic operation: as Douglas-Fairhurst concludes, 'once the past ha[s] been put in its place, the present c[an] be made surprising again'.[39]

My hypothesis is that the *Zibaldone*, as a 'mental journal', responds precisely to the impasse posed by modernity as regards individual and cultural memory: it is only through the inscription within one's own writing and the individuation of a sense, I argue, that the (individual and cultural) ghost can be re-activated, and made to interact with the present (not necessarily with a therapeutic purpose). Through the dialogue with the Library, the individual experience is constructed as an *exemplum* and a point of departure for the universal reflection

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[36] Jacques Lacan, 'The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud', in Id., *Écrits*, transl. by Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg (London-New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2006), pp. 412-41, p. 439.

[37] Slavoj Žižek, *Looking awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), p. 23.

[38] On the relationship between writing, literary criticism and the return of the dead cf. Colin Davis, *Haunted Subjects. Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis and the Return of the Dead* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[39] Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives*, p. 37.

on the 'vera cagione' of 'human nature', through a self-analytical process. The writing of the *Zibaldone* produces then that experience whose loss is lamented by modernity: by being inscribed in writing, everyday matter becomes exemplary and authoritative, giving birth to a 'system'. Still, this experience must necessarily be different from the one of traditional thought, and be instead productively inserted within the most crucial features of modern subjectivity. If, as Giorgio Agamben writes, traditional thought divided experience from science, associating the one with the 'common sense, something existing in every individual (Aristotle's 'judging principle' and the *vis aestimativa* of medieval psychology[…])' and the other to 'the *nous* or the active intellect, which is separate from experience, "impassive" and "divine"',[40] Leopardi's process of self-analysis confronts the ultimately unreliability of modern subjectivity as far as it is grounded in a fissure that situates the modern subject in a perpetual state of unhomeliness. Leopardi can be therefore inserted within Agamben's constellation of thinkers – Montaigne, Rousseau, Schelling, Schopenhauer – who have been 'messengers heralding the surfing emergence of the concept of the unconscious […] up to its original reformulation in the work of Freud'.[41] The isolation of fragments from one's own episodic memory, promoted as paradigms for the science of a new humanism, constructs subjectivity and memory as the seats of experience, and the aporias themselves of the modern and split memory as the privileged source of poetry. We can hence say that quotation, as a fragment extrapolated from the Library, is invested with meaning as far as its interaction with experience (meant as autobiographical memory) determines a redeployment within the system, retraining it within the frame of Leopardi's cultural operation. This operation is however uncertain and fragmented, as reflected both in the *Zibaldone* and in Leopardi's

[40] Giorgio Agamben, *Infancy and History. The Destruction of Experience*, transl. by Liz Heron (London-New York: Verso, 1993), p. 18.
[41] Ibid., p. 40.

oeuvre as a whole. On the one hand, as Leopardi lucidly acknowledges, experience in modern times can only be given through an incessant re-elaboration, as an unstoppable laboratory (of which the *Zibaldone* is at the same time the venue and the most evident epitome). On the other hand, as Agamben writes, within modernity 'every finished work [is] necessarily subject to a limit that only the fragment c[an] transcend. It is superfluous', he continues, 'to recall that, in this sense, almost all modern poems after Mallarmé are fragments, in that they allude to something (the absolute poem) that can ever be evoked in its integrity, but only rendered present through its negation',[42] a consideration that can actually be retrospectively shed to Leopardi. As we will see (chapter I.3.ii.) Leopardi inscribes more or less consciously the experiment attempted by the *Zibaldone* within the Greek genre of *hypomnēmata*, translated in Latin as *commentaria*. Characterised by a peculiarly fragmentary nature, the *hypomnēmaton* shows a certain lightness, especially if compared to treatises, as is particularly evident in a text that Leopardi's knew well, the pseudo-Longingus's treatise *On the Sublime*, in which the author defines his operation as *hypomnēmatisasthai* (I.2.), opposed to Cecilius's s*ýngramma* (I.1.). The *hypomnēmata* genre corresponds therefore to an idea of philosophising as a living laboratory. In parallel, *hypomnēmaton* means literally 'aid to memory', and, figuratively, 'note'. As we will see in the conclusion, this writing meant to be an aid to memory must necessarily stop in the moment in which the past resurfaces, through an anamnestic regression, concretising itself without mediation within the poetic speech.

If we go back from these reflections to the role of Epictetus's *Enchiridion* in the analysed passage of the *Zibaldone*, it is therefore perceivable that the 'untimely meditations' of the Stoic text (re)gain their power through their inscription within Leopardi's textual strategies, and are hence made to interact with an on-going and interminable construction of experience.

[42] Giorgio Agamben, *Stanzas. Word and Phantasm in Western Culture*, transl. by Ronald L. Martinez (Minneapolis-London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 32.

Franco D'Intino distinguished recently between the spheres of the 'zibaldoniano', concerning the 'surface of the text', and that of the 'zibaldonico', related to the hidden and subterranean veins of Leopardi's book.[43] Again, quotation can be seen as liminal points between the two domains. On the one hand, the explicit act of quoting situates the citation in the domain of the 'zibaldoniano'; on the other, the quotation as a ghostly fragment keeps a secret relationship, once it is made to interact with the suffused ambiguity between memory and history that permeates the text, with the demonic domain of the 'zibaldonico'. Quoting, as we have seen, is a form of exorcism, but every exorcism implies a direct relationship with the exorcised demon. The *Zibaldone*, as a 'house of the Ego' that literally constructs Leopardi's authorship, encompasses therefore Epictetus within its labyrinth, enforcing the weakness of the ancient text by violently re-contextualising it at the core of modernity. In parallel, this 'house' is a haunted one: the fissure that divides the grown-up subject from the 'ancient' Ego, as well as modernity as a whole from antiquity, has unavoidably transformed this fragmentary presence of the past into a ghostly survival and a haunting.

Questioning History

The homologous structure of individual and cultural memory asserted by the *Zibaldone* is grounded in the same, archaeological paradigm through which an archaeology of the self and an archaeology of culture are constructed and reciprocally put into confrontation. This paradigm is firmly rooted in the 'concept of history', following [or according to] the definition given by Reinhart Koselleck, according to whom 'the modernity of our epoch

[43] Franco D'Intino proposed this fruitful distinction between the two terms: cf. Franco D'Intino, 'Il monaco indiavolato. Lo *Zibaldone* e la tentazione faustiana di Leopardi', in *Lo 'Zibaldone' cento anni dopo. Composizione, edizioni, temi*, ed. by Rolando Garbuglia, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 2001), vol. II, pp. 467-523, p. 468n.

differs from all the other modernities of past epochs […] by virtue of European culture's achievement of "the concept of history". While European culture has always been characterised by a sense of history, […] only in its modern phase – sometime between 1750 and 1850 – did European society begin to think and act as if it existed in history, as if its "historicity" was a feature, if not the defining feature of its identity' (Hayden White).[44] Through the famous example of Albrecht Altdorfer's painting *Alexanderschlacht* (1528) which opens his *Futures Past*, Koselleck shows how the Romantic Friedrich Schlegel, who 'came across the painting almost three hundred years' after its completion, 'had […] gained a critical-historical distance' which made him 'able to distinguish the painting from his own time, as well as from that of the Antiquity it strove to represent. For [Schlegel]', Koselleck continues, 'history had in this way gained a specifically temporal dimension, which is clearly absent from Altdorfer'.[45] Within modernity, history has undergone a temporalisation, through which the past has been outdistanced and constructed as an otherness. This 'mode of time'[46] implies a substantial alterity of the past, whose reactivation within the present can only take place in the forms of the archaeological fragment, of the conscious operation of revival (as it is the case of Neo-Classicism, or of English Pre-Raphaelism) or of the ghostly presence. It eventually affects individual history, precisely in the fact of being perceived as such: the modern subject – as it is perceivable in the re-evaluation of childhood experiences from Romantic autobiographical writings (let us think of Stendhal's *Vie d'Henry Brulard*) to Freudian psychoanalysis – is historically constructed, and the individual past is placed within

[44] Hayden White, 'Foreword' to Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, transl. by Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. ix-xiv, p. x. On the construction of modern conceptualizations of history see also Hayden White's *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore-London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
[45] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*, transl. by Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), p. 10.
[46] Ibid.

the same tension between familiarity and alterity that characterises the historical one. In other words, for the modern sensibility, as emerged 'sometime between 1750 and 1850', individual and collective memory have undergone the same process of outdistanciation, and their reactivation can only take place through the archaeological paradigm of the exhumation of disjointed fragments, invested with a ghost-like afterlife once they have been inserted within a new frame.

Being caught in the most central moment of this paradigmatic revolution, Leopardi happens to fully embody its subversive charge. As Mario Andrea Rigoni notes, Leopardi can be fully inserted among those – like Winckelmann or Friedrich Schlegel – who most lucidly acknowledged the traumatic distance constructed by modernity with respect to the past: 'nessuno ebbe come lui una percezione così acuta e così chiara del fenomeno e nessuno, neppure fuori d'Italia, fece oggetto di tanta insistita riflessione il fatto che fra antico e moderno esistesse una discontinuità tale da situare questi due mondi su versanti opposti e non comunicanti'.[47] Leopardi's cultural operation nevertheless goes far beyond the nostalgic approach of Neo-Classicism, questioning its most crucial cores in the very moment in which it acknowledges the same fracture.[48] Leopardi's work provides a powerful example of reassessment of the Idealistic 'philosophy of progress', grounded in the very same temporalisation of historical time highlighted by Koselleck, already present in the environment of the Italian Bourbon Restoration. As I will try to demonstrate in the following pages, since the first fragments of the *Zibaldone* Leopardi operates a conceptualisation of time that is by no means grounded on linearity, but which gives a full account of a scattered

[47] Mario Andrea Rigoni, 'L'estetizzazione dell'antico', in Id., *Il pensiero di Leopardi* (Milan: Bompiani, 1997), pp. 9-54, p. 10.

[48] That of Leopardi's Neoclassicism is quite a commonplace in Leopardi criticism: Francesca Fedi has defined it an optical illusion, see *Mausolei di sabbia. Sulla cultura figurativa di Leopardi* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1997), p. 15. Fedi does not however consider the implications of Neoclassicism in terms of philosophy of history.

temporality, marked by fractures, returns and metamorphoses. Leopardi fully sillustrates the setback in which the Neoclassic dream of a rebirth of antiquity had been entrapped, at the same time providing a lucid analysis of its failure. By fully acknowledging the temporalisation of history that occurred in Western culture after the Enlightenment, and therefore the irrecoverable loss of a past definitively constructed as a ruined alterity, Leopardi attempts to define the only conditions through which modernity can be able to experience what Aby Warburg would have called a 'persistence of antiquity' (*Nachleben der Antike*). The place for such a reactivation of antiquity is poetry, as the only location in which the irrecoverable past can be re-conjured and re-staged through the intrinsic, evocative ambiguity of poetic language. As Francesco Erspamer recently noted, for Leopardi 'il passato [è] […] una dimensione del presente, una prospettiva, un'ottica, un'ideologia, attraverso cui rappresentare la realtà e farle assumere un valore sentimentale':[49] once it has become 'parte dell'*Erlebnis* dell'autore, del suo "vissuto"',[50] the past becomes a strategy of outdistancing, an oblique gaze that produces estrangement and defamiliarisation. In doing this, as we will see, Leopardi constantly shifts between the yearning for the reactivation of a historical past (the 'ancients') and that of an individual one (everyone's infancy as the time of 'illusions'). Derived from the rhetoric commonplace of antiquity as the 'infancy of humanity', this Enlightenment *topos* will even reverberate throughout the twentieth century, most notably in Freud's works, from *Totem and Taboo* (1913) to *The Uncanny* (1919) and eventually to *Moses and Monotheism* (1939).

My mention of Warburg and Freud is by no means casual. At the cost of falling into one of the strongest fallacies in Leopardi criticism, namely to frame Leopardi as a more or less

[49] Francesco Erspamer, *La creazione del passato. Sulla modernità culturale* (Palermo: Sellerio, 2009), p. 72.
[50] Ibid., p. 70.

unacknowledged forerunner of later cultural experiences, it is unavoidable not to notice how Leopardi, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, faces and reassesses problems that will be crucial for a specific and later line of thought. A first hint of this possibility of analysis was cautiously introduced by Antonio Prete in his book of 1980, *Il pensiero poetante*:

> […] proprio in questa linea sta la scrittura leopardiana. È questo percorso che può evitare le insidie della storiografia da 'grandi affreschi dello spirito', attestata sull'antinomia classico-romantico. Non è dunque possibile muovere ad una lettura di Leopardi senza prima sottoporre a critica le unità fittizie, le categorie, le stesse modalità di lettura che hanno costituito l'ipoteca storicistica della critica letteraria italiana. D'altra parte non si tratta di leggere Leopardi attraverso altri testi, ad esempio attraverso Nietzsche o Heidegger, Adorno o Benjamin. Tuttavia è proprio la scrittura leopardiana, la sua disposizione al saggio, al frammento, alla genealogia del sapere, ai campi del sapere, ad essere in qualche modo 'rivelata' ed esposta ad una nuova comprensione, *solo dopo* il rivolgimento radicale che nella stessa pratica critica hanno apportato, per sentieri certo differenti, appunto Nietzsche e Heidegger, Adorno e Benjamin.[51]

Although potentially fruitful, this unjustified approaching of such radically divergent intellectual experiences as those of Heidegger's and Benjamin's risks, I think, underestimating and dissolving the specific character of Benjamin's thought, namely its grounding in the German-Jewish cultural environment preceding the rise of Nazism. Moreover, it is precisely concerning the notions of historical time and of progress that the fracture between the intellectual and political experiences of Heidegger and of Benjamin appears most evident, for well-known reasons. The Italian philosophical debate has tended, more or less consciously, to dissolve these motives in an indiscriminate conceptualisation of a 'Central European thought' which has marginalised the German-Jewish peculiarity.

In reference to specifically this peculiarity, that of a cultural milieu which is 'a spiritual synthesis unique in its kind', Michael Löwy highlights its disappearance and its presence as a repressed within European memory: 'Today this German-Jewish culture seems like a

[51] Antonio Prete, *Il pensiero poetante. Saggio su Leopardi* (Turin: Einaudi, 2006), p. 67.

vanished world, a continent erased from history, an Atlantis engulfed by the ocean, along with its palaces, temples and monuments. It was destroyed by the Nazi tide, surviving only in scattered pockets or in exile […] [can you delete the ellipsis?]'.[52] The same consideration is expressed, in 2000, by Georges Didi-Huberman. That of German-Jewish scholars such as Aby Warburg (b. 1866), Carl Einstein (b. 1885) and Walter Benjamin (b. 1892) is of a 'defeated generation' (the expression is Benjamin's, from the *Theses On the Philosophy of History*),[53] which '*ha pagato a caro prezzo il sapere* – ha pagato letteralmente col sangue per sentirsi libera nella gaia scienza storica'.[54] Among these three authors, Didi-Huberman continues, Warburg 'era precipitato nella follia come in un crepaccio aperto dal primo grande sisma mondiale', while both Benjamin and Einstein commit suicide in 1940, after the Nazi occupancy of Paris, while trying to cross the French-Spanish border.[55] The German-Jewish thought of the early twentieth century haunts therefore European history as a repressed memory and a fracture:

> […] la seconda guerra mondiale ha spezzato questo movimento, ma […] il dopoguerra ha sepolto la sua memoria. Come se il momento fecondo di cui parlo fosse morto due volte: distrutto innanzi tutto dai suoi nemici, poi negato – le sue tracce lasciate all'abbandono – dai suoi stessi eredi. Nella grande maggioranza, gli allievi di Warburg emigrarono nel mondo universitario anglosassone. Quel mondo era pronto ad accoglierli, ma non era pronto culturalmente a raccogliere il retroterra di pensiero tedesco, con i suoi riferimenti, le sue costruzioni stilistiche e concettuali, le sue parole intraducibili. Gli allievi di Warburg hanno dovuto cambiare lingua, dunque vocabolario. […] *Rinunciando alla loro lingua*, gli storici dell'arte dell'Europa dilaniata hanno finito per *rinunciare al loro pensiero* teorico.[56]

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[52] Michael Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia. Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe: A Study in Elective Affinity*, transl. by Hope Heaney (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 1.

[53] Quoted in Michael Löwy, *Fire Alarm. Reading Walter Benjamin's 'On the Concept of History'*, transl. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2005), p. 84.

[54] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Storia dell'arte e anacronismo delle immagini*, transl. by Stefano Chiodi (Turin: Boringhieri, 2007), p. 53.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., p. 55.

The crucial task pursued by these thinkers – among whom, for many reasons, we could also include Sigmund Freud – is that of having questioned German Idealism insofar as it presupposed a linearity of history and a predominance of will, determining instead 'the eruption, within a magnetic field polarised by libertarian romanticism and Jewish messianism, of a new concept of history, including a new perception of temporality at variance with evolutionism and the philosophy of progress'.[57] Within this extraordinarily fruitful environment, 'i presupposti generali dell'*estetica* classica erano messi alla prova di una *filologia* rigorosa, e […] questa filologia si vedeva a sua volta interrogata e riorientata da una *critica* in grado di porre i problemi in termini filosofici precisi'.[58] This theoretical reflection involves a new stress on the infinitesimal, be it mathematical concept, Benjaminian monad, philological detail, psychoanalytical symptom or – finally – the troubling anachronism, by which the illusion of a continuity in time is reassessed.[59]

To use Didi-Huberman's vocabulary, Leopardi too pursues his own operation of an anachronistic reactivation of antiquity through a rigorous philology, which is nourished and interfaced through a strong aesthetical and philosophical reflection. Only an equal philological care, open to the problems posed by contemporary theory, can perhaps allow a different perspective on Leopardi's works. A central assumption of my work has therefore been that the theoretical frame provided by German-Jewish thought – and, in this specific case, by the works of Warburg, Benjamin and Freud – can provide fruitful hints for interpreting Leopardi's newness in terms of memory, the past and the use of quotations. The

[57] Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, p. 3.
[58] Didi-Huberman, *Storia dell'arte e anacronismo delle immagini*, p. 55.
[59] Ibid., pp. 41-50. On the paradigm of detail, see the still valuable study by Carlo Ginzburg, 'Spie. Radici di un paradigma indiziario', in *Il segno dei tre. Holmes, Dupin, Peirce,* ed. by Umberto Eco and Thomas A. Sebeok, (Milan: Bompiani, 1983), pp. 95-136. For the connection between the analysis of details in Warburg's method and Freud semeiotics, see Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante,* pp. 273-334.

deep and radical nature of Leopardi's cultural operation would naturally place him among the rank of those who, 'because they were the defeated, because they were outsiders going against the tide of their era, and because they were romantics and incurable utopians', have seen their work as 'becoming increasingly relevant and meaningful' for posterity.[60]

From Hypomnēmata *to* Mnemosyne

This works aims to inquire into the relationship constructed by Leopardi between individual and cultural history, as represented by those points of tension – quotations – through which the text of the *Zibaldone* encompasses, metamorphoses and remodels the 'text of tradition' that Leopardi is confronting.

Throughout my research work, I have confronted myself with the two main orientations of contemporary studies on quotation. In the German-speaking world, theories of quotation have been part of the studies on memory and history inspired by Walter Benjamin's thought, as in the case of Bettina Menke's work. This approach gave a first orientation to my work as a whole, and brought me to contextualise Leopardi's use of quotations in relation to traditional practices of storing individual and cultural memories, including those of medieval and Renaissance 'arts of memory', of the Baroque 'ars excerpendi', of Biblical exegesis, of the writing of the classical moralists (Hadot) and of ancient and humanist philology (Grafton, Timpanaro). In France, the attention to quotations dates to the environment of *Tel Quel* and to the early orientations of structuralism. Its inaugural date can be situated in 1969, when Julia Kristeva publishes her seminal book *Σημειωτική*:[61] ten years later, in 1979, Antoine Compagnon publishes *La seconde main*, originally elaborated in 1977 as a doctoral thesis

[60] Löwy, *Redemption and Utopia*, p. 2.
[61] Julia Kristeva, *Σημειωτική. Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Seuil, 1969).

supervised by Kristeva herself. On the one hand, the French approach has stressed the intertextual aspect of quotation. In *Σημειωτική*, the threefold relationship between the writing subject ('Je'), the text and the 'other' (the other texts constituting the net of intertextual influences) is conceived as a relationship between a finite and an infinite system, and therefore conceptualised as a mathematical concept: through Cantor's set theory, the constant interfacing between the text and the infinite set of 'other' texts is said to generate a potentially unlimited production of meaning ('le sens'). This approach betrays a sort of uniformity in the treatment of manifestations of different intertextual relationships, classified either from the point of view of literary genres (Kristeva) or of their formal structures (Genette), thus underestimating the historical dimension of intertextuality from a diachronic point of view.[62] On the other hand, when analysing the historical evolution of the notion and the practice of quotation, as Compagnon does, we witness a determined proclivity to centre the analysis of quotations on Michel de Montaigne and on the *Essais*. The many studies devoted to the study of the use of quotation in the *Essais* are plausibly rooted in Compagnon's seminal analysis, which in my opinion led to a double consequence. First, the risk is to flatten the formal analysis of the modes of quotations on Montaigne. Second, this operation seems to overvalue the metamorphosis in the practice of quoting (and in the confrontation with tradition) that occurred in the course of the first printing revolution (fifteenth-sixteenth centuries). While confronting Compagnon's analysis with the uniqueness of Leopardi's text, my aim has therefore been to reassess and to re-conceptualise the categories elaborated within the

[62] This is what has been called the 'mémoire pour tout temps et pour quiconque', the 'mémoire démocratique': when the intertextual relationship is presented 'sans rapport [...] avec le document, le monument et le dévoir de mémoire, autrement dit sans rapport avec les témoins de l'histoire, sans rapport avec l'hypothèse ou la reconstitution d'une continuité de l'histoire', we witness a sort of uniformity which can undervalue the complexity of the analysis: see *Storia e memoria nelle riletture e riscritture letterarie/Histoire, mémoire et relectures et réécritures littéraires*, ed. by Jean Bessière and Franca Sinopoli (Rome: Bulzoni, 2005), pp. 10-11.

structuralist field, in the light of Leopardi's case. The problem was to go beyond the Montaigne-centred studies on quotation (and also of the Montaigne-Leopardi comparison, which has been widely explored in Leopardi criticism), and to combine a formal analysis with a historical (and meta-historical) acknowledgment of the cultural fracture in which Leopardi happens to work. This brought me to explore the singular relationship engendered by Leopardi with the so-called 'second printing revolution', and with the fissure of modernity as the age of information and of the ephemerality of culture. At the same time, I stress the tension between the *Zibaldone* as a fragmentary and deconstructed text, and Leopardi's compulsive attention to the accomplished and finite work, both with regard to its content (systematic disposition of subject-matter, argumentative rigour) and the material aspects of writing (orthography, quotation policy).

The first section of this work is consequently dedicated to Leopardi's confrontation with the second printing revolution, that I interpret as an experience of 'shock' and deliberately compare with that of modern crowds analysed by Benjamin in Baudelaire. I therefore analyse the nature of the *Zibaldone* as a 'non-book', in which the vastness and ephemerality of modern printed culture is implicitly questioned as a 'hidden constellation' shining behind Leopardi's experiment (chapter I.1). In the second chapter (I.2.) I analyse the semantics of reading constructed by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone*, arguing that, for Leopardi, the activity of reading is always directed towards a writing project. To paraphrase Roland Barthes's *Critique et verité* (1966), Leopardi discovers the imperative of reading 'as people write' in order to 'glorify' literature:[63] like ancient rhetoric, Leopardi's aim is to learn to write, because 'to read well is virtually to write well'.[64] Through the interaction of philological, linguistic and

[63] Roland Barthes, *Criticism and Truth*, transl. by Katrine Pilcher Keuneman (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 26.
[64] Ibid., p. 42.

rhetoric analyses, the aim of Leopardi was, from his childhood, to understand 'what poets have long known by the name of suggestion or evocation', and which is – as I will argue in the second section – 'the constitutive ambiguity of the poetic (literary) message' acknowledged by Jakobson and highlighted by Barthes.[65] In particular, I show how Leopardi's conceptualisation of reading is grounded in two parallel forms of his relationship with texts: the textual enjoyment engendered by narration, which leads Leopardi to a theorisation of the 'seducing' power of literature, and the practice of close reading as an exercise, later inserted within the theory of the 'assuefazione' developed in the *Zibaldone*. Both relationships bring Leopardi to a specific ideal of literature-making, and to a very personal conceptualisation of literary originality. In the third chapter (I.3.), I explore the genealogy of the notion of 'zibaldone', by analysing the possible influence over Leopardi of the tradition of the 'ars excerpendi', which has been significantly (and surprisingly) underestimated in Leopardi criticism.[66] The close analysis of the opposition, within the *Zibaldone,* between the semantic areas of the 'shapeless' and of the 'accomplished', in the light of the vocabulary of the 'ars excerpendi', can lead, I think, to new perspectives about the construction of Leopardi's book and about its definition itself. Leopardi's choice of fragmentariness appears as an anachronistically productive revitalisation of the 'ancient' genre of *hypomnēmata*/*commentaria*, aiming to face the deadlocks of modern culture.

This analysis is preliminary to the second section, which – after some preliminary remarks on Leopardi's policies of quoting in the text – is structured on a case study. Between 1820 and 1823 Leopardi reads and comments two works by Montesquieu, the *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence* (1734) and the *Essai sur le Goût*

[65] Ibid., p. 27.
[66] See for example the quick liquidation of the *ars* in Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone'*, p. 28.

(posthumously published in 1757). Although Leopardi reads both works in the same object-book (an edition of the Montesquieu's *Œuvres* published in Amsterdam in 1781), his reading strategies appear quite opposite. As I show in the first chapter (II.1.), they can be estimated through a formal analysis of Leopardi's criteria of quotation, which show two separate ways of reading the two texts and lead to two different purposes (project for a future work/construction of a 'system'), different disciplinary domains (political theory and history/aesthetics), and different objects of analysis (comparison between ancient and modern societies/aesthetic effects in literature). This process can allow, I think, to discern how a formal analysis can reverberate in questions of 'content', and viceversa, an aspect that I develop in the following two chapters of the section. In the second (II.2.) I show how the reading of Montesquieu's *Considérations* bring Leopardi to the project of a 'political book'. I inquire into the 'shadow' of such an unwritten work, questioning the problems posed by Leopardi's 'disegni letterari' and the debated role of Leopardi as an 'autore intenzionale',[67] highlighting in parallel Leopardi's problematic and oblique relationship with French revolution as the foundational myth of modern rationalism. In the third chapter (II.3.), I focus on the project derived from the *Essai sur le Goût*, arguing that Leopardi uses Montesquieu as a starting point for discussing the aesthetical problem of grace-'je ne sais quoi' as a crucial challenge of poetry. I show how Leopardi employs the pseudo-Longinus's treatise *On the Sublime* as a formal model for quoting and analysing poetic texts, aiming to retrace the alchemy of the 'je ne sais quoi' of poetry, and ultimately highlight how this research brings Leopardi to reassess problems of literary canonisation and of Italian literary history. This section will help to clarify, I hope, how a formal analysis of quotations can allow to access the

[67] The expression comes from Pier Giorgio Conti, *L'autore intenzionale. Ideazioni e abbozzi di Giacomo Leopardi* (Losone: Alla Motta, 1964), and has been recently rediscussed by Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone'*, pp. 36-39.

veritable structure of the book, as well as of Leopardi's strategies of cultural appropriation, argumentation and writing. Intersected and interwoven in manifold ways within Leopardi's 'non-book', the object 'Montesquieu, Amsterdam 1781' constitutes a subterranean filigree which allows us to retrace the progressive developments of some topics in Leopardi's thought, as well as in his reading practice. Such an exercise in analysis is therefore fruitful as far as it allows us to reconstruct the way Leopardi introjects and re-elaborates his sources, also constituting an example of a 'syntagmatic reading' of the *Zibaldone* such as that proposed by Luigi Blasucci[68]: the different rhetoric strategies employed by Leopardi in metamorphosing Montesquieu's thought and in transferring it to another level of analysis are good examples, I think, of the 'polyphonic dimension' of the *Zibaldone*.

The dimension of the demonic implied in D'Intino's distinction of a sphere of the 'zibaldonico' definitely permeates the third section, in which I will openly discuss the role of memory and the past in Leopardi's work, showing how the laboratory of the *Zibaldone* preludes somehow its final dissolution in the moment in which Leopardi writes the 'canti pisano-recanatesi'. While dissecting 'Le Ricordanze', composed, as we have seen, concurrently with the last fragments of the *Zibaldone*, I analyse how individual and semantic memory collide within the text (chapter III.1.), engendering a tension between the present, a historicised past (expressed by the use of preterite) and the haunting presence of memory (expressed by the imperfect tense). I examine in particular the way Leopardi's ambiguity between individual and collective memory presents structural proximities with the ambiguity articulated in Freud's essay on *The Uncanny* (1919), arguing that both are rooted in post-Enlightenment conceptualisations of history. I reassess then the problem of the presence of myth in Leopardi, proposing a new analysis of the first page of the *Zibaldone* and of the

[68] Luigi Blasucci, 'Quattro modi di approccio allo "Zibaldone"', in Id., *I tempi dei* Canti. *Nuovi studi leopardiani* (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), pp. 229-42, p. 240.

connection of the book with the *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi* (chapter III.2.), as well as a discussion of Leopardi's connection with the problem of history and neo-classical revival (chapter III.3.). The fourth chapter (III.4.) re-discusses the problem of grace-'je ne sais quoi' through a comparison with Aby Warburg's notion of *Pathosformel*, and the hypothesis that the figure of Nerina can be seen as a Warburgian nymph. I connect the mythologem of the nymph to modern evaluation of the instant, going back to Leopardi's experience of reading as a fleeting enchantment. In the conclusion I show precisely how this figure of the 'passing' nymph makes the *Zibaldone*, at this point, unnecessary: the sudden and direct confrontation with the past, concretised in the poetic speech of the 'canti pisano-recanatesi', transforms the archaeology constructed by the *hypomnēmaton* into an extra-temporal dialogue with the dead, that embodies memory, the past and the library within the light density of a new kind of poetry-making.

First Section

THE EPHEMERAL AND THE DURABLE.

THE *ZIBALDONE* AND THE SECOND PRINTING REVOLUTION

CHAPTER1

A NON-BOOK

Far from being writers – founders of their own place, heirs of the peasants of early ages now working on the soil of language, diggers of wells and builders of houses – readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. Writing accumulates, stocks up, resists time by the establishment of a place and multiplies its production through the expansionism of reproduction. Reading takes no measures against the erosion of time (one forgets oneself and also forgets), it does not keep what it acquires, or it does so poorly, and each of the places through which it passes is a repetition of the lost paradise.[69]

Thus, in 1980, Michel de Certeau described the ethereal dimension of reading, which is intrinsically opposed to that of writing as far as the latter tends, almost naturally, towards eternity and durability. As an allegedly unchanged and unchangeable practice, and therefore traditionally situated in an extra-historical dimension, reading was recuperated in the first volume of *The Practice of Everyday Life* as an object of inquiry for an ideal 'history of mentality'. Through this operation, Certeau subverted the traditional hierarchy that only considered writing as a privileged object of analysis. The erratic and ungraspable nature of reading, always belonging to the sphere of the ephemeral, condemned, however, the historian of mentalities to be confronted with a peculiarly fleeting object of analysis. Reading leaves, indeed, no traces 'or it does so poorly'.

This very same quotation was used by Roger Chartier in opening the first chapter of *The Order of Books*, first published in France in 1992.[70] While equally stressing the 'ephemeral'

[69] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, transl. by Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 174.
[70] Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books. Readers, Authors and Libraries in Europe between the Fourteenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, transl. by Lydia G. Cochrane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 1.

dimension of reading, although physically 'embodied in acts, spaces and habits',[71] Chartier individuates the space of construction of meaning in a field of tension engendered by the floating ephemerality of texts and their tangible outcomes, belonging instead to the order of what is 'conservative, fixed, durable'.[72] As Chartier writes, authors 'do not write books: they write texts that become written objects, which may be hand-written, engraved, or printed […]. The space between text and object, which is precisely the space in which meaning is constructed, has too often been forgotten'.[73] The reception of a text is not therefore uniquely determined by textual mechanics, but constructed through a tension between the intangible product of the author's and the physical relationship with the concrete outcome of the bookmaking process.

Both these problems (the ephemerality of reading, and the construction of meaning enacted by the 'objectification' of texts) were clearly present to Leopardi, whose literary and philosophical experience takes fully place within the so-called 'second printing revolution'. By this expression, it is usually labelled the proliferation of printed texts, granted by new technologies and by the emergence of a new and wider public, witnessed by the Western world between the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth centuries.[74] The cultural fracture determined by modern mass culture is lucidly perceived by Leopardi, as it is evident from a very famous passage of the *Zibaldone*, drafted in 1827:

Quanto lo stile peggiora, e divien più vile, più incolto, più *eutelēs*, di meno spesa; tanto cresce l'eleganza, la nitidezza, lo splendore, la magnificenza, il costo e vero pregio e valore delle edizioni. Guardate le stampe francesi d'oggidì, anche quelle delle semplici brochures e fogli volanti ed efimeri. Direste che non si può dar cosa più perfetta in tal genere, se le stampe

[71] Ibid., p.3.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., p. 10.
[74] On Leopardi's relationship with the 'second printing revolution' cf. D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce,* pp. 7-14 and 209-54.

~~d~~d'Inghilterra, quelle eziandio de' più passeggeri pamphlets, non vi mostrassero una perfezione molto maggiore. Guardate poi lo stile di tali opere, così stampate; il quale a prima giunta vi parrebbe che dovesse esser cosa di gran valore, di grande squisitezza, condotta con grand'arte e studio. Disgraziatamente l'arte e lo studio son cose oramai ignote e sbandite dalla professione di scriver libri. Lo stile non è più oggetto di pensiero alcuno. Paragonate ora e le stampe dei secoli passati, e gli stili di quei libri così modestamente, così umilmente, e spesso (vilmente, abbiettam.) poveramente impressi; colle stampe e gli stili moderni. Il risultato di questa comparazione sarà che gli stili antichi e le stampe moderne paion fatte per la posterità e per l'eternità; gli stili moderni e le stampe antiche, per il momento, e quasi per il bisogno. [...] Se mai fu chimerica la speranza dell'immortalità, essa lo è oggi per gli scrittori. Troppa è la copia dei libri o buoni o cattivi o mediocri che escono ogni giorno, e che per necessità fanno dimenticare quelli del giorno innanzi; sian pure eccellenti. Tutti i posti dell'immortalità in questo genere, sono già occupati. Gli antichi classici, voglio dire, conserveranno quella che hanno acquistata, o almeno è credibile che non morranno così tosto. Ma acquistarla ora, accrescere il numero degl'immortali; oh questo io non credo che sia più possibile. La sorte dei libri oggi, è come quella degl'insetti chiamati efimeri (éphémères): alcune specie vivono ~~3 o 4 giorni~~ poche ore, alcune una notte, altre 3 o 4 giorni; ma sempre si tratta di giorni. Noi siamo veramente oggidì passeggeri e pellegrini sulla terra: veramente caduchi: esseri di un giorno: la mattina in fiore, la sera appassiti, ~~:~~o secchi: soggetti anche a sopravvivere alla propria fama, e più longevi che la memoria di noi. [...] Perchè non ai soli letterati, ma ormai a tutte le professioni è fatta impossibile l'immortalità, in tanta infinita moltitudine di fatti e di vicende umane, dapoi che la civiltà, la vita dell'uomo civile, e la ricordanza della storia ha abbracciato tutta la terra. Io non dubito punto che di qua a dugent'anni non sia per esser più noto il nome di Achille, vincitor di Troia, che quello di Napoleone, vincitore e signore del mondo civile. (*Zib.* 4268-70, 2 April 1827)

The mass culture granted by the second printing revolution is therefore, for Leopardi, an experience of 'shock', in the sense given to this Freudian concept by Walter Benjamin in relation to the experience of modern crowds in Baudelaire.[75] Modern books are ephemeral beings, in accordance with the 'accelerazione del tempo subita dai secoli diciottesimo e diciannovesimo' that has constructed the 'half-hour' as the maximum time allowed for keeping a reader's attention alive.[76] In the same way as Baudelaire 'is always aware of' the crowd, which thus happens to be 'imprinted on his creativity as a hidden figure' and a 'hidden

[75] Cf. Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in Id., *The Writer of Modern Life. Essays on Charles Baudelaire*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, transl. by Howard Eiland, Edmund Jephcott, Rodney Livingstonte and Harry Zohn (Cambridge, MA/London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 170-210.

[76] Michael Caesar, '"Mezz'ora di nobiltà": Leopardi e i suoi lettori', in *Leopardi a Firenze*, ed. by Laura Melosi (Florence: Olschki, 2002), pp. 461-72, p. 465. Cf. also D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, pp. 9 and 189.

constellation' that shines behind his work,[77] the experience of mass culture granted by early contemporary printing technologies is always present to Leopardi both as a reader and as a writer, and clearly conceptualised within the framework of his project of cultural action.

Leopardi's cultural apprenticeship actually takes place in the space of his father's library. This was a singular commixture in itself of *Ancien Régime* culture, since it was mainly composed with books purchased from the libraries of suppressed convents, and of a certain post-revolutionary ideal of ordered and shared knowledge, open as it was to public. In the library, the young Leopardi experiences a double way of relating to the domain of written culture. On the one hand, he never forgets the possibility a performative aspect of culture, tending to an oral dimension and involving a strong physicality (which D'Intino calls 'una condizione mentale omerica').[78] On the other, Leopardi shows a full understanding of the potentialities of the modern cultural market, concretised in a constant longing for entering contemporary debate (as it is evident in the case of the Classicist VS Romantic quarrel).

Similarly, Leopardi the writer shows a deep and even neurotic acknowledgment (which confirms the traumatic nature of his way of experiencing modernity, in accordance with Benjamin's model) of the construction of meaning produced by the text once it has become a 'written object'. Maria Corti highlights how Leopardi as a child possessed a 'concezione fisica dell'arte':

> una raccolta di versi era prima di tutto un 'libretto', un oggetto rettangolare con frontespizio ornato di disegni geometrici o floreali a penna, fornito di data e luogo di composizione, a cui seguiva una pagina bianca con la sua brava saggia epigrafe oraziana […]; indi fogli pieni di scrittura ordinata, titoli fioriti di maiuscole, qua e là fregi; come *ex libris* l'uccello o il cigno o l'albero in fiore […]. A volte un prologo e un indice; qualche frontespizio così elegante da

[77] Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', pp. 180-81.
[78] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, p. 169.

competere con le stampe; ma ciò che colpisce è il dato materiale della scrittura, una calligrafia pulita e ordinatissima, anche nelle correzioni, pagine dalla casta meticolosità.[79]

This meticulousness is preserved in Leopardi's later career as a constant intervention in the processes of publication, aiming at bridging the gap between 'text' and 'written object' and at directing the construction of meaning through such apparently irrelevant aspects of bookmaking as punctuation. As D'Intino shows, the scrupulous care that Leopardi pays while proofreading his *Canzoni* in 1823 belongs to the same order of ideas,[80] confirmed by the plan – of 1825 – for a 'Trattatello della punteggiatura'.[81] The clarity granted by contemporary printed techniques should be associated with relevance in terms of style, in order to take advantage of what modernity has to offer, which – as Leopardi notes – does not happen in most of cases. In the *Pensieri*, Leopardi notes how the ephemerality of contemporary mass culture engenders a dissonant effect if compared with the luxurious refinement of printing techniques:

[...] al tempo nostro, più che va mancando, non posso dire l'uso, ma la memoria delle virtù dello stile, più cresce il nitore delle stampe. Nessun libro classico fu stampato in altri tempi con quella eleganza che oggi si stampano le gazzette, e l'altre ciance politiche, fatte per durare un giorno: ma dell'arte dello scrivere non si conosce più né s'intende appena il nome. E credo che ogni uomo da bene, all'aprire o leggere un libro moderno, senta pietà di quelle carte e di quelle forme di caratteri così terse, adoperate a rappresentar parole sì orride, e pensieri la più parte sì scioperati. (*Pensieri* LIX).[82]

By acknowledging the problems posed by material culture and modern medias, Leopardi therefore drafts an ideal of the modern author taking full control of a text's editorial process,

[79] Giacomo Leopardi, *'Entro dipinta gabbia'. Tutti gli scritti inediti, rari e editi 1809-1810*, 1972, ed. by Maria Corti (Milan: Bompiani, 1972), p. xxi.
[80] Franco D'Intino, 'Errore, ortografia e autobiografia in Leopardi e Stendhal', in *Memoria e infanzia tra Alfieri e Leopardi*, ed. by Marco Dondero and Laura Melosi (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2004), pp. 167-183.
[81] *TPP*, p. 1111.
[82] *TPP*, p. 639.

in order to bridge the gap between the intellectual construction of a text and the material shaping of its eventually published achievement.

From this perspective, the *Zibaldone* represents a very peculiar experiment. Quite curiously, Roger Chartier indicates that the only case of identity between 'text' and 'written object' in the 'manuscript book', being, 'in fact, […] the notarial register or, in Italy, the *libro-zibaldone*'.[83] These kinds of writings are usually

> unadorned, small or medium-sized books, written in a cursive hand, […] copied by their own readers, who put in them, in no apparent order, texts of quite different sorts in prose and in verse, devotional and technical, documentary and poetic. […] The unity of such a book comes from the fact that its producer is also its addressee.[84]

The main features of the *Zibaldone*-genre are hence its heterogeneity in terms of materials and the substantial equivalence between sender and receiver of the written communication, finding its principal outcome in a *de facto* identity between 'text' and 'written object'. These aspects do evidently apply to Leopardi's text as well. The problem of the reader, in particular, is lucidly raised by Pacella:

> uno dei problemi più interessanti e complessi dello *Zibaldone* riguarda il rapporto del suo autore con eventuali destinatari. Non credo vi siano dubbi sul carattere di 'documento segreto' dello *Zibaldone* […]. Questo potrebbe far pensare a una scrittura del tutto privata, dove non vi è spazio per un interlocutore, al geloso riserbo con cui si tiene un diario che deve restare inaccessibile agli altri.[85]

Surely, this reflection could be problematized by taking into account the inner plurality of voices in the *Zibaldone*, such as Leopardi's frequent rhetorical questions, simulations of dialogues and dialectic analyses. Similarly, it should also be highlighted how the problem of

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[83] Chartier, *The Order of Books*, p. 55.
[84] Ibid., pp. 55-56.
[85] Introduction to Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, pp. xi-xxxiv, pp. xxx-xxxi.

the 'reader' of the *Zibaldone* does not concern an 'actual' reader but the internal strategies of communication articulated within the text, which defines an 'ideal' (Eco) or 'implied' reader (Iser).[86] From this viewpoint, the inner mechanics of the *Zibaldone* are surely far more articulated than those of the *Zibaldone*-like books mentioned by Chartier. Moreover, these texts fully belong to early modern culture and are therefore products of the first revolution in print which took place between the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth. In other words, they are still attributable to the cultural world of Michel de Montaigne, in which no complete fracture with medieval practices of construction of knowledge has been produced and the activity of reading is mainly characterised by an 'esibita mancanza di metodo'.[87] The experience of culture is engendered by the meticulous registration of morcels excerpted from *auctoritates*, 'in no apparent order'.

It can be therefore said that Leopardi re-activates, in a quite anachronistic way, a writing genre that belongs to another age in order to tackle the most crucial issues of his own one: as we will see more closely in the second chapter of this section, the *Zibaldone* presupposes a revitalisation of the early modern *ars excerpendi* in order to challenge evidently contemporary cultural aporias. This makes of the *Zibaldone* a puzzling textual object, which openly questions long established categories of textual criticism. The *Zibaldone* is actually a single-copy manuscript, which is not conceived for publication, or – at least – not in that specific shape. Still, it is somehow open to a whatsoever audience and possesses a sort of collective dimension: unlike intimate journals (even those produced by writers, as it is the case of Pavese's *Il mestiere di vivere*), the *Zibaldone* presupposes a potential public and implies an at

[86] For the notion of 'ideal reader' see Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula* (Milan: Bompiani, 1979); for that of 'implied reader' cf. Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, transl. by David Henry Wilson (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).
[87] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, p. 24.

least embryonal future use. At the same time, it is not even a notebook: Leopardi does not use it as a rough copy for future works. Although some potential future works are somehow implicit in the *Zibaldone* (as it happens with the project of a 'political book', or the 'Dissertazioni omeriche' planned in 1828, *TPP*, p. 1113), the actual nature of the text seems more that of an intellectual laboratory in which Leopardi's theoretical position is developed through the constantly flowing motion of writing.

From this angle, the editorial vicissitudes undergone by the *Zibaldone* are particularly eloquent, especially as far as the notion of 'authority', from a philological point of view, is concerned. Unlike manuscripts that are explicitly or implicitly conceived for future publication, the *Zibaldone* is characterised – as we have seen – by a hybrid and liminal nature, legitimating a definition of it as a 'non-book'. The identity between 'producer' and 'addressee', to use Chartier's terms, which is mirrored by the one between 'text' and 'object', questions the legitimacy itself of an edition whatsoever. In transforming a text into another 'object', editing always implies a process of normalisation, concretised by uniformity in terms of typographic conventions, division into separate paragraphs, suppression of mistakes, dissolution of the original division into pages, and conversion of handwriting into typographic fonts. In the case of the *Zibaldone*, this may affect the construction of meaning in many ways. Leopardi's writing is always extremely clear, as if the text was conceived for a certain purpose of readability, which has often led some interpreters, like Emilio Peruzzi, to postulate the existence of lost rough copies. The drafting of thematic indexes to the text shows that the author's will, at least from a specific elaboration phase onwards, tends to consider the manuscript as an autonomous work, directed towards a book-like shape. The editorial process may therefore dissolve those aspects of the text – such as mistakes, corrections, additions

made in different times testified by different kinds of ink and writing tools – that can be crucial for the understanding of its inner and subterranean genealogy.

This problem emerged as an object of controversy when, at the beginning of the 1990s, two critical editions of the *Zibaldone* appeared, characterised by completely different editorial criteria. While Giuseppe Pacella's one (1991) opted for a traditional way of editing, giving systematic account of corrections and mistakes in the apparatus, Emilio Peruzzi's edition (1989-1994) chose instead to provide photographic reproduction of the manuscript's pages, assuming that, in the specific case of the *Zibaldone*, no other choice would fully enable a reader to perceive the text's peculiarity. In accurately (although quite factiously) reconstructing the argument, Lucio Felici has noted recently that

> la soluzione 'facile' di Peruzzi si palesava […] di una radicalità e di un integralismo a dir poco sconcertanti. Partendo dalla convinzione che il famoso 'scartafaccio' era in massima parte una 'bella copia' con scrittura nitidissima, egli dichiarava in sostanza che la riproduzione fotografica sostituiva l'edizione critica, rendendola superflua o addirittura sviante: secondo lui, solo sulle foto 'ogni studioso sarà in grado di leggere ciò che è effettivamente scritto nell'autografo, potrà subito distinguere visivamente ciò che è originario e ciò che è successivo, e avrà modo di osservare come e con che grafia e in quale punto Leopardi aggiunge, corregge, cancella'. Dunque, dopo aver criticato Pacella in nome della 'buona filologia', Peruzzi arrivava a negare, paradossalmente, le ragioni stesse della filologia, mettendo al suo posto la tecnica del fotografo.[88]

What Felici calls 'la tecnica del fotografo' is an attention to the medial dimension of writing that is crucial, as we have seen, for Leopardi's reflection. Without any doubt, the challenges raised by the *Zibaldone* as a unique textual object – and reaffirmed by the philological controversies arisen in this respect – are deeply connected with the nature itself of the *Zibaldone* as a liminal and radical cultural project. Elaborated within the fullest second printing revolution, and alongside a critical analysis of what culture is and should be like in

[88] Lucio Felici, *La luna nel cortile. Capitoli leopardiani* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2006), pp. 195-212, p. 203.

modern times, the *Zibaldone* cannot be disjointed by its intentionally pursued nature as a non-book, in which the 'shock' of modern printed culture emerges like a 'hidden constellation'. An analysis of the content of the *Zibaldone* as a laboratory for Leopardi's 'pensiero poetante' should therefore involve an inquiry into its nature from a medial point of view as well as into those formal aspects that reveal its relationship with the world of printed culture that it presupposes.

One of these formal aspects is represented by quotations. The constant tension between the space of the *heimlichkeit* (Recanati, his parents' house) and the desire for escape, later concretised, leads Leopardi to ideate a series of projects aiming at condensing the space of the 'Library' within a portable format. As Lucio Felici highlights, the two anthological projects of the *Crestomazia de' poeti* and *de' prosatori* are conceived, among other purposes, for acting as a surrogate of the Recanati library,[89] in the same way as Antonio Prete speaks of the *Operette morali* as of a 'biblioteca fantastica' that takes precisely shape from the physical one of Leopardi's youth.[90] Novella Primo has recently recalled an intuition by Marcello Andria and Paola Zito, in order to ascribe within this constantly pursued project the literary draft of a 'Biblioteca foziana del secolo 18', equally aimed at constructing a library made of excerpted fragments.[91] We can definitely say that the *Zibaldone* goes in the same direction, especially when we consider its diachronic construction.

If we take Antoine Compagnon's definition of quotation as a relationship of exchange between two texts (T_1 and T_2) and/or between two authors (A_1 and A_2),[92] we actually notice that in the fragments written between 1817 and 1818, which form the first seventy-two pages

[89] Felici, *L'Olimpo abbandonato*, p. 198.
[90] Antonio Prete, 'La biblioteca fantastica delle *Operette morali*', *Il piccolo Hans*, XXIX (1981), pp. 71-108.
[91] Novella Primo, *Leopardi lettore e traduttore* (Leonforte: Insula, 2008), p. 31 n.53.
[92] Compagnon, *La seconde main*, p. 56.

of the manuscript, no proper quotation – namely including such elements as the author's name, a significant portion of the original text and bibliographical references – appears (cf. table I).[93] The only and significant exception is represented by Ludovico di Breme's 'Osservazioni sul "Giaurro" di Byron', published in the *Spettatore* in 1818 and quoted by Leopardi in *Zib.* 18, in which however the quotation is used a significant part of the argument, with the aim of drafting the main theses of the forthcoming *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*. Moreover, the quotation is imperfect, as if Leopardi was only giving a quick glance at the original text: the quotation is nothing but a reading note, only used in order to construct Leopardi's own argumentation. Leopardi notes how

> Breme […] dice che l'immaginazione […] desidera di essere invasa rapita ec. e anche sedotta (qui vi voleva) purché non da cose al tutto arbitrarie nè lontane da quel vero ec. In queste parole e specialmente in quell'anche e in quell'al tutto, mi par di ~~vedere~~ scorgere chiarissima~~nt~~mente l'angustia del metafisico, che vedendo la linea del suo ragionamento torcersi e piegare, cerca di rimediarci con le parole (*Zib.* 18).

The original passage from Breme is:

> Ma la immaginazione è una facoltà troppo essenziale per credere che possa mai disperdersi, e cedere nulla di sue perenni ragioni: ella è pur sempre quella facoltà che anela a essere invasa, rapita, innamorata, atterrita, e perfin sedotta; nè avverrà mai che non soggiaccia alle illusioni delle forme armoniche, alle estasi della sublime contemplazione all'efficacia dei quadri ideali, purché non sieno più arbitrarj del tutto, o del tutto nudi di analogia con quel vero che ne circonda, o con quello ch'è in noi, e che a ragione abbiamo intitolato, un Vero infinito: il lettore si avvede che io tocco qui ad un altro fra i caratteri della moderna poesia, di cui ella è

[93] The only exceptions to this scheme have all specific reasons. The 'Canzonette popolari che si cantavano al mio tempo a Recanati' of *Zib*. 18 are transcribed for historical and documentary purposes. The reflections about Italian lyrical tradition of *Zib.* 23-28 include quotations of single or double poetic lines, without bibliographical sources; the same can be applied to two lines from Voltaire quoted in *Zib*. 31 and to a quotation from Petrarch at p. 60. In all these cases, as we will see, the act of quoting is justified by a stylistic analysis of single expressions. The same reasons can be applied to the philological notes about Celsus of *Zib.* 32-36, in which quoted passages undergo specific linguistic analyses, as well as to the passage of p. 43, where Leopardi discusses the etymology of the word 'blitri o blittri o blitteri'.

gelosa, e altiera sen va come di una sua conquista nei campi della rigenerata filosofia, dico la legge delle *armonie della natura*.[94]

The *Zibaldone* quotation is clearly imperfect. Leopardi skips over Breme's first consideration ('la immaginazione è una facoltà troppo essenziale per credere che possa mai disperdersi, e cedere nulla di sue perenni ragioni'), and goes directly to the effects that the imagination longs for: Breme's proliferation of past participles, connected by an asyndeton but with commas ('invasa, rapita, innamorata, atterrita, e perfin sedotta'), is quickly rendered without commas, with an 'ec.' after the first two locutions and with the substitution of 'perfin' with 'anche' ('invasa rapita ec. e anche sedotta'). The second quotation is also imperfectly rendered. Leopardi condenses in a simplified sentence what Breme had expressed with two ones: 'purché non sieno più arbitrarj del tutto, o del tutto nudi di analogia con quel vero che ne circonda' becomes 'purché non da cose al tutto arbitrarie nè lontane da quel Vero'.

It seems therefore that while drafting page 18 Leopardi is quoting by heart. The operation is slightly different in the course of the elaboration of the *Discorso* in which Breme's passage is instead quoted literally:

Ora tornando al Cavaliere, seguita egli dicendo immediatamente che la facoltà immaginativa è sostanzialissima nell'uomo, di maniera che non può svanire né scemare, ma per l'opposto arde oggi come sempre d'*essere invasa rapita innamorata atterrita* e perfin sedotta (qui sta il punto); *né avverrà mai che non soggiaccia alle* illusioni *delle forme armoniche, alle estasi della sublime contemplazione, all'efficacia dei quadri ideali, purché non sieno più arbitrari* del tutto, *e* del tutto *nudi di analogia con quel vero che ne circonda, o con quello ch'è in noi.* Ed ecco come anch'egli concede che la poesia debba ingannare, la qual cosa poi asserisce e conferma risolutamente in cento altri luoghi delle sue osservazioni. A me pare di scorgere molto chiaramente che il Cavaliere medesimo arrivato a questo passo vide che il suo ragionamento si piegava, e la punta si disviava, e s'io non erro, quelle parole *perfino* e *del*

[94] Ludovico di Breme, '*Il Giaurro, frammento di novella turca, scritto da lord Byron, e recato dall'inglese in versi italiani da Pellegrino Rossi* – Ginevra, 1818 (Osservazioni)', *Lo Spettatore italiano*, 10 (1818), pp. 46-58, p. 51.

tutto sono la saldatura ch'egli ci volle fare, come tutto giorno si fa, dopo che quello, torcendosegli fra le mani, se gli fu rotto.[95]

Leopardi does not reproduce the original commas (Breme: 'essere invasa, rapita, innamorata, atterrita, e perfin sedotta'; Leopardi: '*essere invasa rapita innamorata atterrita* e perfin sedotta') and Breme's text undergoes a typographic normalisation ('arbitrarj', 'arbitrari'). The colloquial aside 'qui vi voleva' of the *Zibaldone* becomes a more formal 'qui sta il punto', while the general argument is more extensively articulated, eliminating the polemic against metaphysics and focusing on the two expressions 'perfino' and 'del tutto' as symptoms of Breme's weak argumentation. All these features are to be connected to the two texts's different natures: the *Zibaldone* pages are clearly quickly drafted reading notes, while the *Discorso* is a polished manuscript aimed for publication. The *Zibaldone* is basically, at this stage, a laboratory for future works: the writing of the *Zibaldone* can include inaccuracies, situated as it is in an intermediate position between the 'library' and Leopardi's own writing.

Apart from this example, in the first seventy-two Leopardi drafts nothing but quick references, aiming to retrace specific passages for future purposes, without, however, engaging in directly quoting the original text or giving detailed references: these notes presuppose, in other words, a constant accessibility of the original sources that would make more elaborated ways of quoting unnecessary. This policy is however abruptly interrupted while quoting a passage from Madame de Staël's *Corinne ou l'Italie* that Leopardi read in a Parisian edition of 1812:

[95] Giacomo Leopardi, *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*, ed. by Rosita Copioli (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), pp. 76-77.

L'~~homme~~ ame est si mal à l'aise dans ce lieu, (dice la Staël delle catacombe liv. 5 ch. 2 de la Corinne) ~~que~~ qu'il n'en peut résul~~t~~ter aucun bien pour elle. L'homme est une partie de la création, il faut qu'il trouve son harmonie morale dans l'ensemble de l'univers, dans l'ordre habituel de la destinée; et de certaines exceptions violentes et redoutables peuvent étonner la pensée, mais effraient tellement l'imagination, que la disposition habituelle de l'ame ne saurait y gagner. (*Zib.* 73-74, circa 1819)

Here, the full quotation of a passage follows the original edition closely, even in reproducing what Leopardi could perceive as mistakes in the correct spelling of French ('ame' instead of *âme* and 'effraient' instead of *effrayent*).[96] The bibliographical reference is put in between brackets, and incorporated within the text: it refers to the internal division of the text rather than to a specific edition, and it is remarkable how these data are given in French and not in Italian ('liv[re]', 'ch[apitre]'). No specific writing technique is employed in order to separate the quotation from Leopardi's own text: there are no quotation marks, nor is the French text underlined. Why does this alternative way of quoting occur? In 1819, the *Discorso* had been sent to the Milanese publisher Stella, who did not reply. In the same months, Leopardi considers the possibility of using 'quello che ho scritto […] ne' miei Pensieri, della poca speranza di buona originalità poetica in questi tempi' for a work 'della condizione presente delle lettere italiane'.[97] Above all, in the summer of 1819, Leopardi attempts to escape from Recanati. In such mutated context, the *Zibaldone* should change its role and, most of all, its strategy in quoting. In other words if, within the context of the 'library', Leopardi could simply draft reading notes, without particularly caring about inaccuracies, the potential absence of the physical library requires quotations to be transcribed in order to have them at hand for future purposes. In many respects, a quotation actually

[96] These orthographic features are willingly reproduced in Pacella's critical edition, in order to safeguard the faithfulness to Leopardi's text, see Pacella's note in *Zibaldone*, vol. III, p. 508. They do not however belong to the edition that Leopardi had at his disposal only, as Pacella writes, but they are in Staël original text and form a part of Staël's own orthography; see Madame de Staël, *Corinne ou l'Italie*, ed. by Simone Balayé (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), p. 134.
[97] *TPP*, p. 1110.

depends on a foreseen inaccessibility of the source. This explains the accuracy in copying Staël's passage, as well as the indication of the book and chapter, because – while not pointing to a specific edition – Leopardi's reference aims to potentially retrace the quotation in every other copy of the book. The desire for a physical and intellectual freedom influences therefore (and can be assumed from) the practice of quoting within the text: quotation allows the *Zibaldone* to become a moving and intellectual library, freeing its author from the strict relationship with the physical one. As Antonio Prete summarises, Leopardi's 'scartafaccio' 'si alimenta di una biblioteca reale mentre insegue il disegno di un'*altra* biblioteca',[98] and is subsequently constructed as a support for memory (*hypomnēmaton*)[99] in view of a direct cultural action.

Quotations therefore form the intermediary and liminal space between reading and writing that stands at the core of Leopardi's experience of 'shock' and of the radical newness of the *Zibaldone* as a response to this shock. Situated between the 'ephemeral' dimension of reading and the 'durable' one of writing, quotations engender, in the *Zibaldone*, a double move. On the one hand, they presuppose and refer to a uniformity in terms of printed culture that only the second printing revolution could grant, forming the materials of future works that aim to be inserted within that very context of cultural production. On the other hand, once incorporated within the text and inserted within Leopardi's own argumentation, they are trapped within the argumentative structure of the non-book, enacting a dialogue that only the space itself of the *Zibaldone* makes possible.

The act itself of composing a '*libro-zibaldone*' implies at least three moments-moves: reading, isolation and excerption of passages, and eventually their re-transcription (which is

[98] Ibid., p. 9.
[99] For the genre of *hypomnēmata* cf. the chapter 3.b.

called quotation).[100] These three steps (consecrated, as we will see, by a quite ancient and respectable tradition) are precisely, in Certeau's terms, the 'measures' taken by the reader 'against the erosion of time', a way of 'keep[ing] what [reading] acquires'. They do not even necessarily need to perform this act in a 'poor' way. The problem of forgetting haunts the practice of reading since its foundational myth, the one of Thoth as related in Plato's *Phaedrus.* This myth is also widely present in Leopardi's reflection. With regards to Leopardi's *Elogio degli Uccelli*, D'Intino notes how Leopardi 'aveva ben presente quel luogo, citato più volte negli anni in cui si appassionò alla questione omerica; e più in generale conosceva benissimo tutto il dialogo, letto e postillato minuziosamente nel gennaio-aprile 1823'.[101] The act of quoting is precisely an (at least empirical) answer to the impasse of forgetting, in the very moment in which 'un filosofo così marcatamente scritturale' as the Amelio of the *Elogio degli uccelli* (but also as Leopardi himself in which he poses the problem of written culture in the contemporary age) questions the possibility itself of producing knowledge in an age in which knowledge has abandoned the dimension of orality, and has been embodied in the form of (printed) book.[102] The problem is therefore two-fold: on the one hand, what is at stake is the development of an individual thought in an age of information, symbolically and physically embodied by the structure of the 'library'. On the other hand, the question is how reading – and therefore the assimilation of culture – can escape from the dimension of ephemerality, reaching new forms of storage, organisation and production of knowledge. The individual memory confronts therefore the corpus of culture,

[100] 'Lorsque je cite, j'excise, je mutile, je prélève. Il y a un objet premier, posé devant moi, un texte que j'ai lu, que je lis; et le cours de ma lecture s'interrompt sur une phrase. Je reviens en arrière: je re-lis. La phrase relue devient formule, isolat dans le texte' (Compagnon, *La seconde main*, p. 17).
[101] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, p. 28.
[102] Ibid.

developing strategies against the risk of 'forgetting' that the Platonic myth has inescapably projected onto those cultures that have emerged from an oral dimension.

A useful notion for understanding this process is that of 'inner library', coined by Pierre Bayard.[103] Bayard makes the specific example of Michel de Montaigne, troubled by his inclination towards forgetting books and information: the problem of memory that haunts Montaigne is that his autobiographical and affective memory prevails over the semantic one, determining the constitution of the 'inner library' in which the two forms of memory are juxtaposed, and actual content of books is replaced by personal reflections. This leads Montaigne to conceive a set of notes at the end of each volume, in order to reconstruct the impression experienced while reading, and to prevent further amnesias.[104]

Three centuries later, in Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, the attitude is completely reversed. The obsession for memory is analogous but Leopardi adopts a radically different strategy. Like the *Essais*, the *Zibaldone* too is (among other purposes) meant to be an aid for memory: the act itself of writing the 'pensieri' is already, in itself, a mnemotechnical exercise, led through a systematic programme of repetitions, recapitulations, internal references, additions and incorporations. As Antonio Prete states,

> se confrontato con gli *Essais* di Montaigne e con i *Cahiers* di Valéry, lo *Zibaldone* mostra una sua propria singolarità: i frammenti si cercano tra di loro per possibili e mobili aggregazioni discorsive, e la mappa dei saperi non segue classificazioni predefinite ma intersezioni, riprese, balzi e connessioni.[105]

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[103] Pierre Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, transl. by Jeffrey Mehlman (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 72.

[104] On Montaigne's practice of quoting see also Michael Metschies, *La citation et l'art de citer dans les 'Essais' de Montaigne*, transl. by Jules Brody (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1997); Christine Brousseau-Beuermann, *La Copie de Montaigne: etude sur les citations dans les 'Éssais'* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1989); Floyd Gray, *Montaigne bilingue: le latin des 'Éssais'* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1991). Montaigne also holds an important place in Compagnon's analysis of the formal structure and historical development of quotation in *La seconde main*.

[105] Prete, *Il pensiero poetante*, p. 196.

Read books do not enter the pantheon of an extra-temporal and disembodied knowledge but are systematically and carefully quoted in order to retrace the edition in which they have been consulted: the scientific policy of the philologist intersects the full acknowledgment of the *république des lettres* created by the second printing revolution. Concurrently, Leopardi's private writing is kept potentially open to publication and dissemination, with the full conscience of a new cultural world in which popular press has determined the substantial homogeneity of the textual universe of reference. The affective element is eventually acknowledged and dissected, leading Leopardi to a veritable theory of reading and of the intellectual operation it entails. Far than being surprised by the textual selections naturally operated by his mind, Leopardi uses his own experience in order to define specific hermeneutic of reading, as we will see in the following chapter.

Situated on the fracture between reading and writing, and well self-conscious of the peculiarity of its historical position, the *Zibaldone* overpasses therefore the dichotomy articulated by Michel de Certeau: as tended between reading and writing the *Zibaldone* 'travels' *and* 'founds', 'accumulates' *and* speculates over oblivion.

CHAPTER 2

LEARNING TO READ, LEARNING TO WRITE

For Leopardi as a child, reading is a double experience. On the one hand, it belongs to the order of pleasure. As Leopardi writes in the *Zibaldone*, 'seppi leggere, ed amai di leggere, assai presto'. This form of 'textual pleasure' is an enjoyment grounded in narration, in which the oral and the written dimensions are still strongly interconnected.

> Mi dicono che io da fanciullino di tre o quattro anni, stavo sempre dietro a questa o quella persona perché mi raccontasse delle favole. E mi ricordo ancor io che in poco maggior età, era innamorato dei racconti, e del maraviglioso che si percepisce coll'udito, o colla lettura […] (*Zib.* 1401, 28 July 1821)

On the other hand, reading means learning by heart, a spiritual exercise whose aim is to discipline one's mind. The education received by Leopardi house shows a strongly Jesuitical structure, and the programmes of the demonstrations publicly held by the Leopardi brothers in the years 1808 and 1809, show how learning was essentially grounded on the mnemonic assimilation of notion and texts.[106] Reading is an accumulation of materials whose model and ambition is the erudite compendium. This approach reverberates in Leopardi's first philological and erudite exercises: in the works of the years 1813-15, Sebastiano Timpanaro noted, 'le note hanno per lo più un carattere non esegetico, ma erudito-compilatorio: ogni volta che l'autore antico nomina un personaggio storico o una località, il Leopardi raccoglie tutte le altre testimonianze in proposito, ingolfandosi spesso in lunghe digressioni'.[107]

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[106] See Leopardi, *'Entro dipinta gabbia'*, pp. 469-89. In particular, in the course of the public demonstration of 1809, Giacomo and his brother Carlo are requested to recite some translations and compositions of their own.

[107] Sebastiano Timpanaro, *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi*, p. 9.

Leopardi's maturation as a proper philologist, which is described by Timpanaro as a sort of spontaneous miracle,[108] should be problematised – I think – precisely in the light of this double attitude towards reading, and more specifically within the frame of the so-called 'literary conversion' (1815-19) and the first attempt made in these years to intervene within the concurrent literary debate on Romanticism. In these years, Leopardi's main influences are those of his uncle Carlo Antici and of Pietro Giordani. Antici had addressed his nephew's uncertain and divided vocation towards Greek philosophers and early Christian moralists,[109] with the aim of directing his intellectual endeavours to Christian apologetics. If Timpanaro's schematism opposes the 'philologist' to the 'apologist', undervaluing the latter aspect in favour of the former, the margin between the two figures appears, in giving a closer look, as definitely more shaded. Under his uncle's influence, Leopardi's analysis actually begins to address the problems of eloquence and of language's relation to power, thus favouring a careful attention to language issues, both in the domains of philology and poetry. This process takes place concurrently with the progressive acknowledgment of the mediated and artificial nature of language, carefully trained through translation (the pseudo-Homer's *Batrachomyomachia*, translated as *La guerra dei topi e delle rane*, and Mosco's *Idylls*, both made in 1815) and pastiche-making (as the *Inno a Nettuno* of 1816). In both cases, reading means to possess and to assimilate a source whose outcome is the 'flavour' of the original: reading the ancients is first of all learning to think *like* the ancients in order to seize their language and style.[110] Equally, since 1817, Pietro Giordani encourages the young Giacomo to

[108] 'infine, in alcune note, dedicate alla discussione di varianti e di congetture, dal compilatore e dall'apologista vediamo sorgere il filologo', ibid., p. 10.
[109] On Carlo Antici's influence and its persistence over the years see D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, pp. 85-93.
[110] On the notion of 'flavour' see Franco D'Intino, 'Il gusto dell'altro. La traduzione come esperienza straniera in Leopardi', in *Hospes. Il volto dello straniero da Leopardi a Jabès*, ed. by Alberto Folin (Venice: Marsilio, 2003), pp. 147-158.

the reading of the Italian classics, with the similar aim to let him learning a style and acquiring a perfect prose through reading and exercise. As it is well know, Giordani's advice is accepted by Leopardi in a very personal way, especially as far as the ideal 'canon' of Italian literary history is concerned. Still, Giordani's guidance appears as having been highly formative. In July 1821, while Leopardi is indirectly questioning the Italian canon and the possibility itself of poetry through the frame of the problem of 'grace', the apprenticeship led under Giordani's influence is directly connected with the evaluation of reading as an imperative task for the writer-thinker.[111]

The attentive care for language that philology requires and which Leopardi shows in his philological works[112] should be subsequently considered within the wider framework of Leopardi's influences, and, more specifically, within his theorisation of the practice of reading. What I will attempt to explore in this chapter is that Leopardi's theory of reading, as developed in the *Zibaldone*, situates the full understanding of a text in the empathic relationship entailed with it ('immedesimazione'), meticulously educated and directed by exercise ('assuefazione'). The main critical task to be undertaken by the author-theorist is thus individuated in the identification of those textual mechanisms that produce determined effects in the reader. This operation is always undertaken with the direct purpose of individual writing: Leopardi's reading is never disjointed from the aim to directly engage in personal

[111] 'Pochissimi', writes Leopardi, 'trovavano piacere nella lettura del buono stile italiano, durante l'ultima metà del secolo passato, e i primi anni di questo. Oggi moltissimi; e quei medesimi che non vi trovavano alcun diletto, anzi noia ec., oggi se ne pascono con gran piacere […]. Fra questi così cambiati', concludes Leopardi, 'sono ancor io' (*Zib.* 1320, 14 July 1821). On the day before, he had recalled his reading 'degli scrittori italiani d'ogni sorta e d'ogni stile', and the choc experienced at the encounter with Daniello Bartoli: 'io posso dire per esperienza che la lettura del Bartoli […] fa disperare di conoscer mai pienamente l~~e~~a forz~~e~~a, e la infinita varietà delle forme e sem~~p~~bianze che la lingua italiana può assumere. Vi trovate', writes Leopardi, 'in una lingua nuova' (*Zib.* 1313-14, 13 July 1821).

[112] Leopardi, writes Timpanaro, possessed since youth 'quel gusto della lettura attenta e […] "puntuale", quell'esigenza di capire il testo fin nei particolari, che è la caratteristica specifica del filologo', *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi*, p. 11.

elaboration, and reading is therefore conceptualised as an 'exercise' directed towards the acquisition of writing skills. Leopardi's 'philological' attitude is therefore, and predominantly, a peculiar and paradoxical mixture of 'empathic' and sharply critical attitude. While acknowledging the 'seducing' power of texts, the theorist Leopardi dissects the meanings by which that very power is set into action, with the aim of finding his own way of 'seducing'. In this interweavement of self-identification and rational criticism, Leopardi seems to reproduce the double attitude in reading experienced in his early years.

2.a. 'Immedesimazione'

In drafting his theory of reading, Leopardi acknowledges that the post-Enlightenment relationship with texts has turned the public and performative dimension of antiquity into the private one of the author/reader communication. This has made reading become a matter of seduction, grounded in the subtle persuasion entailed by the text, which is most evident in the case of the so-called 'sentimental novels'. In reconstructing the readings of a late eighteenth-century French merchant, Robert Darnton equally notes how Jean-Jacques Rousseau's popularity can be seen as aftermath of a new way in approaching texts: post-Enlightenment readers look for an emotional empathy, showing a 'sentimental' way of reading that entails a different form of textual enjoyment.[113]

The charm of sentimental novels is clearly felt by Leopardi himself, which can be doubtlessly seen as a direct derivation of the pleasure engendered by listening to narrations experienced in his early youth. Reading sentimental novels is, for Leopardi, a private

[113] Robert Darnton, 'Readers Respond to Rousseau: the Fabrication of Romantic Sensitivity', in Id., *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), pp. 215-56.

enjoyment, which is consciously separated from the readings undertaken as a duty (like those suggested by Antici or Giordani). Leopardi's endeavour is, however, and since the beginning, tended towards a writing project, although almost immediately aborted as that of an autobiographical novel.[114] Once again, reading is never disjointed from the attempt of self-writing, conformably to Leopardi's mimetic reading technique, since the beginning aiming to possess writing styles.

This experience is grounded in the reading of Madame de Staël's *Corinne* and of Goethe's *Werther*, both cases in 1819,[115] and leading to a first reflection about the risks of over-identification, potentially leading to affectation:

> Molti sono che dalla lettura de' romanzi libri sentimentali ec. o acquistano una falsa sensibilità non avendone, o corrompono quella vera che avevano. Io sempre nemico mortalissimo dell'affettazione massimamente in tutto quello che spetta agli effetti dell'animo e del cuore mi sono ben guardato dal contrarre questa sorta d'infermità, e ho sempre cercato di lasciar la natura al tutto libera e spontanea operatrice ec. (*Zib.* 64 [1819])

Novels, Leopardi arguments, do not induce emotions in an arbitrary way but rather amplify and emphasise the subject's natural inclinations. The most evident example is that of suicide, strengthened by the model of Goethe's *Werther* but already present as a temptation. The power of novels resides in the artificially created empathy with characters, which provides readers with a charming frame in which to situate their own passions:

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[114] I am speaking of the sketch known as 'Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno', whose first inspiration plausibly came from the reading of Goethe's *Werther* and of Foscolo's *Ortis* that Leopardi undertook at the beginning of 1819: cf. D'Intino's reconstruction in Giacomo Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, ed. by Franco D'Intino (Rome: Salerno, 1995), pp. xliv-vli.

[115] Leopardi read Staël's *Corinne* in an edition published in Paris in 1812, and Goethe's *Werther* in a translation of 1796 (*Verter. Opera originale tedesca del celebre signor Goethe trasportata in italiano dal D.M.S.*, Venice). 'D.M.S.' is to be read as 'Dottor Michel Salom'. Salom's translation is crucial in Leopardi's thought, since specific textual echoes have been retraced, for example, in the 'L'Infinito': see Pino Fasano, *L'Europa romantica* (Florence: Le Monnier, 2004), pp. 301-04.

A ogni modo mi sono avveduto che la lettura de' libri non ha veramente prodotto un [sic] me nè affetti o sentimenti che non avessi, nè anche verun effetto di questi, che senza esse letture non avesse dovuto nascer da se: ma pure gli ha accelerati, e fatti sviluppare più presto, in somma sapendo io dove quel tale affetto moto sentimento ch'io provava, doveva andare a finire, quantunque lasciassi intieramente fare alla natura, nondimeno trovando la strada come aperta, correvo per quella più speditamente. Per esempio nell'amore la disperazione mi portava più volte a desiderar vivamente di uccidermi: mi ci avrebbe portato senza dubbio da se, ed io sentivo che quel desiderio veniva dal cuore ed era ~~naturale e~~ nativo e mio proprio non tolto in prestito, ma egualmente mi parea di sentire che quello mi sorgea così tosto perchè dalla lettura recente del Verter, sapevo che quel genere di amore ec. finiva così, in somma la disperazione mi portava là, ma s'io fossi stato nuovo in quest~~x~~e cose, non mi sarebbe venuto in mente quel desiderio così presto, dovendolo io come inventare, laddove (non ostan~~ch~~te ch'io fuggissi quanto ma~~s~~i si può dire ogni imitazione ec.) me lo trovava già inventato. (*Zib.* 64)

Self-identification is not therefore emulation ('imitazione') but self-abandonment to the seducing power of the work of art and to its ability of showing the final outcomes of emotional drives ('in somma la disperazione mi portava là'). This effect is not necessarily dangerous or limited to sentimental novels. In the *Zibaldone* passages of 1823 on Homer's *Iliad* and the role of the reader, for example, Leopardi shows how self-identification formed a significant part of the relationship entailed by the public of ancient epic poetry.[116] This public was naturally moved to sympathise with hapless heroes: a situation that Leopardi knew well, having written at the age of eleven a poem on Hector's death from the point of view of the vanquished hero.[117] The narration of heroic facts can therefore produce positive effects, amplifying the audience's natural disposition towards virtue:

[116] Cf. in particular *Zib.* 3095-3167 (5-11 August 1823), which can be considered as a micro-treatise on the epic genre.

[117] Leopardi, *'Entro dipinta gabbia*', p. 61. Maria Corti emphasises 'l'attenzione del ragazzo al dato formale e la conseguente attività variantistica', being a sign of a precocial textual consciousness (p. 57). Equally, Corti highlights the formal connection of Hector's death with that of Cato in the *Catone in Affrica*, underlining how the 'due eroi vinti' are naturally 'prediletti dal ragazzo' (ibid.).

La cagione di quella contentezza di noi stessi che proviamo nel leggere le vite o le gesta dei grandi e virtuosi (v. Montesquieu l.c. ch.16. p.176.) è che (eccetto i malvagi di professione e di coscienza, i quali certo non provano questo effetto) l'uomo o è buono, o mezzo buono mezzo cattivo, come la maggior parte, nel qual caso ciascuno sente che l'istinto suo naturale e la sua ~~intima~~ destinazione è la virtù, e si considera appresso a poco come virtuoso. Ora quello che gli dà una grande idea della virtù e gli mostra coll'esempio a che cosa port~~ai~~, e come si faccia ammirare, accresce l'idea di se stesso, anc~~h~~orchè uno non vi rifletta, cioè ingrandisce l'opinione e la stima di quella qualità, che ciascuno, anche senza avvedersene distintamente, sente esser naturale ~~e~~ in lui, e propria del suo essere. […] Omero farà sempre in tutti questo effetto, e un francese diceva che gli uomini gli parevano un palmo più alti quando leggeva Omero. (*Zib.* 124, 12 June 1820)

The seducing power of literature should therefore be positively addressed in accordance with a pedagogic aim. This is the main problem of contemporary literature, what Leopardi abstractly defines as 'Romantic'. The Romantics 'seduce' the reader in a negative way, making use of 'affectation' and cheap effects in order to match a coarse public's longing for 'newness'. If Goethe's style had been able to channel and to direct Leopardi's natural inclination towards suicide, this had mainly happened because of Goethe's proper and careful use of literary strategies. The 'Romantics'' use of literature is subsequently improper and pretentious insofar as they recur to easy stratagems in order to charm their readers.[118] The

[118] This reflection traverses the *Zibaldone* for many years in a subterranean way, crossing other apparently different questions. In spring 1821 Leopardi condemns the use of graphical effects by the romantics as a cheap and affected writing strategy: a writer should oblige the reader to the spiritual exercise of the evocation of concepts, not by symbols and onomatopoeic effects (*Zib.* 975-77, 22 April 1821). The romantics' use of graphic symbolism is close, in Leopardi's view, to Chinese writing: 'i sentimenti e le idee non si vogliono più scrivere ma rappresentare, e non sapendo significare le cose colle parole, le vorremo dipingere o significare con segni, come fanno i cinesi la cui scrittura non rappresenta le parole, ma le cose e le idee' (*Zib.* 975). Chinese ideograms have permitted the survival of ancient writing through the mutation of spoken language (see *Zib.* 1179-80, 17 June 1821), but alphabetic writings require a more complex anthropological operation (*Zib.* 2948-60, 12-14 July 1823): to speak in Leopardi's terms, they require a more skilful technique, and are therefore more 'marvellous'. In the *Zibaldone*'s internal semantics, graphic effects and ideograms can be assimilated to the domain of painting and drawing ('Or non è dunque meglio che lo scrittore volendo scrivere in questa maniera, si metta a fare il pittore?', *Zib.* 977), drastically opposed to poetry: 'Il racconto è uffizio della p~~r~~arola, la descrizione del disegno (eseguito in qualunque modo). Quindi non è maraviglia che quello sia più facile di questa al parlatore' (*Zib.* 164, 12 July 1820). This notion of 'disegno' includes also description as a poetic

notion of seduction is borrowed from the already mentioned passage of Ludovico di Breme's review to the translation of Byron's *Giaour*:

il Breme […] dice che l'immaginazione anche al presente ~~alla p~~ ha la sua piena forza, e desidera di essere invasa rapita ec. e anche sedotta (qui vi voleva) purché non da cose al tutto arbitrarie nè lontane da quel Vero ec. [….] Ma poichè finalmente affermate che la nostra immaginazione ha bisogno d'esser sedotta [….] il vostro ragionamento va tutto a terra: pchè [sic] quando ~~uno si~~ uno di noi si mette a leggere una poesia sapendo di dover esser sedotto e desiderando di esserelo, tanto più crede al falso quanto al meno falso, tanto crede al Milton quan~~x~~o a Omero, tanto agli spettri del Bürg~~h~~er quanto all'inferno dell'Odissea e dell'Eneide [...]. (*Zib.* 18 [1818])

A year later, the same notion is implicitly evoked by quoting Madame the Staël's *Corinne*, in a passage of the *Zibaldone* that I have previously cited:

L'~~homme~~ ame est si mal à l'aise dans ce lieu, (dice la Staël delle catacombe liv. 5 ch. 2 de la Corinne) ~~que~~ qu'il n'en peut résult~~t~~er aucun bien pour elle. L'homme est une partie de la création, il faut qu'il trouve son harmonie morale dans l'ensemble de l'univers, dans l'ordre habituel de la destinée; et de certaines exceptions violentes et redoutables peuvent étonner la pensée, mais effraient tellement l'imagination, que la disposition habituelle de l'ame ne saurait y gagner. Queste parole sono una solenniss. condanna degli orrori e dell'eccessivo terribile tanto caro ai romantici, dal quale l'immaginazione e il sentimento in vece d'essere scosso è oppresso e schiacciato, e non trova altro partito a prendere che la fuga, cioè chiuder gli occhi [della fantasia] e schivar quell'immagine che tu gli presenti. (*Zib.* 72-73)

The connection with Leopardi's confutation of Breme's text is suffused but strong. If the 'point' of Breme's discourse was that the soul yearns to be 'perfin sedotta', Leopardi's lexical choices are here, and plausibly not by chance, highly sexualised. If the point is that the reader must be seduced, the Romantics – Leopardi implicitly asserts – are rude and brutal seducers. Instead of being moved, the reader is 'oppresso e schiacciato, e non trova altro partito a

strategy: 'era falso ed assurdo quel genere di poesia poco fa tanto in pregio e in uso appresso gli stranieri massimamente, che chiamavano descrittiva' (ibid.); 'quegli sciocchi poeti, i quali vedendo che le descrizioni nella poesia sono piacevoli hanno ridotto la poesia a continue ~~sole~~ descrizioni, hanno tolto il piacere, e sostituitagli la noia' (*Zib.* 2599, 7 August 1822).

prendere che la fuga, cioè chiuder gli occhi della fantasia'. The analysis of the manuscript confirms this hypothesis: 'della fantasia' is a later addition, by which Leopardi seems to mitigate what is, in fact, the depiction of an assault.

It is, however, worth mentioning how this process of 'seduction' is not limited, for Leopardi, to poetry. In November 1820, while distinguishing between the literal understanding of texts and their full enjoyment, Leopardi notes that the first effect is easily accessible to everybody ('le buone poesie sono ugualmente intelligibili agli uomini d'immaginazione e di sentimento, e a quelli che ne sono privi'), but the second one requires a more refined sensibility ('quelli le gustano, e questi no, anzi non comprendono come si possano gustare', *Zib.* 347, 22 November). Those who lack 'immaginazione' and 'sentimento' 'non sono capaci nè disposti ad esser commossi, sublimati ec. dal poeta', namely to be seduced. They are unable to identify their own passions with those described, and this subsequently destroys the self-identification in which the power of literature is grounded.

> sebbene intend~~o~~ano le parole, non intendono l~~e~~a verità, l'evidenza di quei sentimenti: il cuore ~~loro~~ non dimostra loro che quelle passioni, quegli effetti, ~~e~~quei fenomeni morali ec. che il poeta descrive, vanno veramente così: e per tal modo le parole del poeta, benchè chiare, e da loro bene intese non rappresentano loro quelle cose e quelle verità che rappresentano altrui, ed intendendo le parole, non intendono il poeta. (ibid.)

This also happens with philosophical and, more in general, theoretical writings ('anche negli scritti filosofici, profondi, ~~e~~metafisici, psicologici ec.', ibid.). The literal meaning ('il senso materiale dello scritto') is evident to every reader but nevertheless not necessarily understood in an appropriate way (*Zib.* 348). A proper and not superficial reading implies a mimetic identification with the author ('mettere la […] mente nello stato in cui era quella dell'autore' and 'pensare colla stessa profondità dell'autore'), thus putting the text in relationship with the actual matter of fact ('vero') and therefore questioning its reliability

(‘non basta intendere una proposizion vera, bisogna sentirne la verità. C'è un senso della verità, come delle passioni, de' sentimenti, bellezze, ec.: del vero, come del bello’, ibid.). This approach does not uniquely imply critical inquiry but also and most of all a deep and empathic relationship with the author (‘tanta capacità di riflettere, da potersi porre nei panni dello scrittore, e in quel punto preciso di vista e di situazione, in cui egli si trovava nel considerare le cose di cui scrive’, *Zib.* 349). As Leopardi concludes, this very method has allowed him to fully understand Madame de Staël’s writings, ‘che tutti danno per oscurissimi’.[119]

Moreover, the experience of reading is renewed every time, since every great author is different from the others and understanding each one means to learn a new language: ‘[s]iccome la lingua greca per se stessa è immensa’, writes Leopardi in September 1821 referring to the Greeks (but surreptitiously, as we will see, the consideration can be widened), ‘così passando da uno scrittore all’altro, ritrovate un altro piccolo vocabolario suo proprio, […] e le espressioni familiari di ciascun autor greco sono ~~infinite~~ moltissime e continue, ma diverse quelle dell’uno da quelle dell’altro, quasi fossero più lingue’ (244). Two years later, Leopardi perfects this analysis: ‘ciascuno autor greco ha, per così dire, il suo Vocabolarietto proprio’, which does not only mean that each one of them uses ‘sempre o quasi sempre quelle tali parole, [...] laddove gli altri altre n’usano, [….] ma eziandio in ordine al significato delle stesse parole o frasi che anche gli altri usano, o che tutti usano’ (*Zib.* 2866, 1 July 1823). This happens not only in the case of ‘autori vissuti in ~~di~~ diverse epoche, […] ma eziandio di autori contemporanei, e compatriotti ancora’: the perfect example is again Xenophon as compared to Plato, ‘i quali furono di più condiscepoli, e trattarono in parte le stesse materie, e la stessa

[119] This consideration is hardly to be referred to the *Corinne*, and is more plausibly to be linked to the *De la littérature* (see D’Intino, *L’immagine della voce*, pp. 93-94).

Socratica filosofia' (*Zib.* 2867).[120] Approaching Greek authors, but in general great ones from every literature, requires consequently a deep care on the part of the reader:

> [...] è da~~r~~ por mente assai, e da notar sempre in ciascuno autore, massime ne' classici, qual è il preciso senso in cui egli suole o sempre o per lo più adoperare ~~una~~ ciascuna parola o frase. Trovato e notato il quale, si rende facile la intelligenza dell'autore, e se ne penetrà~~à~~a la proprietà e l'intendimento vero delle espressioni, e si spiegano molti suoi passi che senza la cognizione del significato da lui solito d'attribuirsi a certe parole, non s'intenderebbero; com'è avvenuto a molti interpreti e grammatici ec. che spiegando~~li~~ questi passi secondo l'uso ordinario di quelle tali parole o frasi, e non considerando~~l~~i~~e~~ in quello particolare ch'~~gli~~esse ~~suole~~ sogliono aver presso quello scrittore, o non hanno saputo strigarsi o si sono ingannati. (*Zib.* 2868-69)

Reading is therefore a matter of 'knowing', and taking one's place within the literary world. In a lucid passage of 22 August 1820, Leopardi compares 'la lettura per l'arte dello scrivere' with 'l'esperienza per l'arte di viver nel mondo, e di conoscer gli uomini e le cose' (*Zib.* 222). Leopardi delineates, here, a sort of Kierkegaardean *Enten-Eller* between 'art' and 'life', in which is maybe dissimulated an intertextual memory of Dante's Ulysses ('divenir del mondo esperto/e delli vizi umani e del valore', *Inf.* XXVI, 98-99): the art of reading is a 'folle volo' 'nello studio della lingua e dello stile'. 'Distendete e applicate questa osservazione, […] e vedrete che la lettura ha prodotto in voi lo stesso effetto dell'esperienza rispetto al mondo': reading is an 'experience' in another world, a constant dialogue with the library, 'quella che

[120] Xenophon's works were not present in the Recanati library: this absence was particularly shameful for Leopardi, who therefore asked Giordani, in 1817, to buy a copy for him in Milan in 1817 (cf. Timpanaro, *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi*, p. 16). The reading of Xenophon leaves profound traces: 'Si suol dire che leggendo certi autori ~~semplicisssimi~~ semplici piani spontanei fluidi facili disinvolti naturali ec.', writes Leopardi in 1819, 'pare ~~di~~ a tutti di saper fare così […]. Ma leggendo ~~s~~Senofonte par proprio che tutti scrivano così e che non si possa nè si sappia scrivere altrimenti, ~~fine~~ se non quando si passa da lui a un altro scrittore o da un altro scrittore alla lettura di esso' (*Zib.* 62). Xenophon troubles the reader in being a perfect example of simplicity and nonchalance in writing, since, if 'gli altri scrittori si capisce che son semplici', while reading him 'non si scorge neppur ciò' (ibid.).

un poeta come René Char chiamava la conversation souveraine, la *conversazione sovrana*' (Prete).[121]

This consideration discloses the strongly *social* dimension in which Leopardi's reading practice is inserted and its aim for a public aftermath of his intellectual endeavour. In August 1820, Leopardi highlights how 'le persone di poca immaginaz. e sentimento non sono atte a giudicare di poesia' (*Zib.* 227). This does not only happen, however, with superficial people, but also with those who possess 'immaginazione' and 'sentimento', but who in 'molte ore, giorni, mesi, stagioni, anni […] non sono atte a sentire, e ad ~~a~~essere trasportate, e però a giudicare rettamente tali scritture' (ibid.). Well-reading depends on one's own state of mind, which is essentially relative and transitory: reading is grounded in two parallel and concurrent processes that the subject can only control to a certain extent, 'sent[irsi] trasportare' and 'immedesima[rsi] […] collo scrittore' (ibid.).

These two expressions are actually more significant than it could seem at first glance. The notion of 'trasporto' directly descends from Leopardi's deep meditation over the pseudo-Longinus's essay *On the Sublime* and on the function of poetry: it is a trace of the psychological meditation made over literature and its mechanisms, from Homer to sentimental novels and beyond. That of 'immedesimazione' betrays one of the most tenacious constant elements of Leopardi's way of relating with the world. On the one hand, it evokes the strongly physical component of the young Leopardi's way of reading: reading (or hearing) a story, is to cry together with characters and to be moved by the very same passions conjured by the text; in other words – as D'Intino writes – to lose control,[122] which makes of reading a counterproductive activity for philosophical objectivity, at least according to Leopardi's

[121] Antonio Prete, 'Un anno di Zibaldoni e altre meraviglie', 2004 <http://www.zibaldoni.it/comunicato_stampa/index_frascati_a.htm>

[122] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, pp. 166-69, where several related passages are quoted.

statement around his philosophical turn of 1819-20.[123] On the other hand, the 'immedesimazione' with the author fully discloses how, for Leopardi, reading is never a neutral act - it is never undertaken with the purpose of mere amusement, as Leopardi will clearly state in 1827.[124] This is already evident in the autobiographical draft of circa 1819 known as *Supplemento alla vita del poggio*:

Da fanciullo avendo veduto alcune figure di S. Luigi a cavallo per Roma, che la gente diceva, *ecco il Santo*, disse, ancor io, cresciuto che sarò, voglio farmi Santo, e la gente vedendomi passare, dirà *ecco il Santo*. Vedete l'entusiasmo di gloria che l'accendeva. […] egli era fanciullo, ed avea ragione d'ingannarsi così grossamente, dando principio alla santità con l'ambizione.Utilità e *scopo* degli studi rendutogli *vicino e immediato* coll'uso di compor libretti, e coprirli bene, e farli leggere.[125]

[123] 'La mutazione totale in me […] seguì si può dire dentro un anno, cioè nel 1819. dove *privato* dell'uso della vista, e *della continua distrazione della lettura*, *cominciai* a sentire la mia infelicità ~~a~~in un~~a~~ modo assai più tenebroso, cominciai ad abbandonar la speranza, *a riflettere profondamente sopra le cose*' (*Zib.* 144, 1 July 1820, emphasis mine). The inability to read produces a surplus of writing: 'in questi pensiero ho scritto in un anno il doppio quasi di quello che avea scritto in un anno e mezzo' (ibid.).

[124] 'Chi legge un libro (sia il più piacevole ~~d~~ e il più bello del mondo) non con altro fine che il diletto, vi si annoia, anzi se ne disgusta, alla seconda pagina. Ma un matematico trova diletto grande a leggere una dimostrazione di geometria, la qual certamente egli non legge per dilettarsi' (*Zib.* 4266, 30 March 1827). On 6 April Leopardi widens this very same consideration to his own experience: 'Io stesso, che pur non ho maggior piacere che il leggere, anzi non ne ho altri, ed in cui il piacer della lettura è tanto più grande, quanto che dalla primissima fanciullezza sono sempre vissuto in questa abitudine (e l'abitudine è quella che fa i piaceri) quando talvolta per ozio, mi son posto a leggere qualche libro per semplice passatempo, ed a fine solo ed espresso di trovar piacere e dilettarmi; non senza maraviglia e rammarico, ho trovato sempre che non solo io non provava diletto alcuno, ma sentiva noia e disgusto fin dalle prime pagine. E però io andava cangiando subito libri, senza però niun frutto; finchè disperato, lasciava la lettura, con timore che ella mi fosse divenuta insipida e dispiacevole per sempre, e di non aver più a trovarci diletto: il quale mi tornava però subito che io la ripigliava per occupazione, e per ~~fin~~ modo di studio, e con fin d'imparare qualche cosa, o di avanzarmi generalmente nelle cognizioni, senza alcuna mira particolare al diletto. Onde i libri che mi hanno dilettato meno, e che perciò da qualche tempo io non soglio più leggere, sono stati sempre quelli che si chiamano ~~,~~ come per proprio nome, dilettevoli e di passatempo' (*Zib.* 4273-74).

[125] Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, pp. 123-24.

Sanctity is a contingency, what matters is (an already deeply laic) ambition. And ambition is concretised by the 'uso di compor libretti, e coprirli bene, e farli leggere', namely by the extreme care paid the child Leopardi in all the material aspects of book making, that Maria Corti correctly identified with a sign of neurosis and psychological repression.[126] This is the only 'utilità e *scopo*' of reading: the composition of 'little books' is equally nothing more than a tiny step on the route to 'glory', a 'close and immediate' way of getting popularity, that can be seen as a sort of general rehearsal.[127] 'Immedesimarsi collo scrittore' therefore means repeating the self-identification with St Louis, aided by mimetic talent and by a peculiar taste for literature as an artificial medium: in other words, the 'pieghevolezza dell'ingegno facilità d'imitare' evoked at the beginning of the *Vita abbozzata*.[128]

Reading is hence an (almost physical) exercise, producing experience, whose purpose is to learn a style and whose outcome is personal writing. It implies a protean attitude and a long study, since, as we have seen, the full understanding of an author implies learning a new and different language, but also because self-identification and mimesis can lead to wearing several masks: 'quante volte, leggendo p.e. un filosofo, siamo al tutto del suo avviso, e poi leggendone uno contrario, mutiamo parere, e tornando a leggere il primo, ~~ripigli~~ o altro dello stesso sentimento, ripigliamo la prima opinione' (1694-95, 14 September 1821). In other words, Leopardi suggests, it is only through polyphony that one can learn the single, unique sound of an author's own style: still, for Leopardi, this is always the result of an effort. 'Non c'è maraviglia, dove non c'è difficoltà' (*Zib.* 977, 22 April 1821).

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[126] Corti speaks of the 'casta meticolosità' of Leopardi's early 'little books' 'che, pur col beneficio d'inventario delle tradizioni calligrafiche, si fa una grande fatica a non leggere come indizio di psicologica repressione' (in Leopardi, *'Entro dipinta gabbia'*, p. xxi).

[127] 'io non saprei niente se non avessi allora avuto il fine immediato di far dei libretti ec. necessità di questo fine immediato nei fanciulli che non guardano troppo lungi mirandoci anche gli uomini assai poco' ('Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno', in *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, p. 107).

[128] Ibid., p. 45.

2.b. ‘Assuefazione’

The education received by Leopardi emerges in his concurrent conceptualisation of reading as exercise. In speaking about the necessity of deepening the knowledge of every Greek author as if a new language was being learned, Leopardi stresses the fact that such aim can only, however, be reached by means of a strong discipline:

> Certo non [...] si arriva a pienamente e propriamente intendere qualunque autor greco che si abbia *presa pratica* del suo particolar Vocabolario, e de’ significati di questo: e tal pratica è necessario di farla in ciascuno autore che si prende nuovamente ~~e~~o dopo lungo intervallo a leggere: benchè in alcuni *costa più in altri meno*, e in certi *costa tanto*, che solo i *lungamente esercitati e familiarizzati colla lezione e studio* di quel tale autore sono capaci di bene intenderne e spiegarne la proprietà delle voci e frasi, e della espressione sì generalmente, sì in ciascun passo. (*Zib.* 2869, emphasis mine)

This idea of ‘long exercise’ as a crucial step in learning how to read is supported by the notion of ‘assuefazione’, one of the central ones of the *Zibaldone*. The initial and epidermic pleasure of reading can be turned into taste through habit and practice. With respect to reading/writing, Leopardi introduces this concept in July 1821. At this stage, Leopardi seems to reflect on the peculiarities of his own ‘ingegno’. His vocabulary is characterised by a certain modesty, as it is evident in a note of 20 July, where he wonders why he has managed to understand modern metaphysics (and to implicitly confute them) although being a ‘piccolo spirito’ (*Zib.* 1347-48, 20 July 1821). The same happens in a note of 1 July, where he attempts an analysis of what differentiates the ‘povero ingegno mio’ from the ‘ingegni volgari’:

> Io nel povero ingegno mio, non ho riconosciuto altra differenza dagl’ingegni volgari, che una facilità di assuefarlo a quello ch’io volessi, e quando io volessi, e di fargli contrarre abitudine forte e radicata, in poco tempo. Leggendo una poesia, divenir facilmente poeta; un logico,

logico; un pensatore, acquistar subito l'abito di pensare nella giornata; uno stile, saperlo subito o ben presto imitare ec.; una maniera di tratto che mi paresse conveniente, contrarne l'abitudine in poco d'ora ec. ec. [….]. Il volgo che spesso indovina, e nelle sue metafore esprime, senza saperlo, delle grandi verità, e dei sensi piuttosto propri che metaforici, sebben tali nell'intenzione, chiama fra noi, (e s'usa dire familiarmente anche fra i colti, ed anche scrivendo) testa o cervello duro (cioè organi non pieghevolei, e quindi non facili ad assuefarsi) chi non è facile ad imparare. L'imparare non è altro che assuefarsi. (*Zib.* 1254-55)

Leopardi acknowledges in himself the ability of 'divenir maturo, pratico […] in uno stile, con una sola lettura, cioè con pochissimo esercizio'. This is a 'segno ed effetto del talento', determining a mimetic attitude in every aspect of life ('assuefarmi ai diversi metodi di vita, e […] dissuefarmene agevolmente mediante una nuova assuefazione') that makes the subject '*esercitato* in qualunque cosa a me più nuova' (*Zib.* 1312, 12 July 1821, emphasis mine). It also determines, with more specific relation to literature, what Leopardi calls the 'facoltà imitativa', namely the skill of imitating and of producing *pastiches* that he had been improving in the previous years and also later (e.g. with the fake fourteenth-century 'volgarizzamento' of the *Martirio de' santi padri*, written a year later).

La facoltà imitativa è una delle principali parti dell'ingegno umano. L'imparare in gran parte non è che imitare. Ora la facoltà d'imitare non è che una facoltà di attenzione esatta e minuta all'oggetto e sue parti, e una facilità di assuefarsi. Chi facilmente si assuefa [sic], facilmente e presto riesce ad imitar bene. Esempio mio, che con una sola lettura, riusciva a prendere uno stile, avvezzandomicisi subito l'immaginazione, e a rifarlo ec. Così leggendo un libro in una lingua forestiera, m'assuefacevo subito dentro quella giornata a parlare, anche meco stesso e senza avvedermene, in quella lingua. Or questo non è altro che facoltà d'imitazione, derivante da facilità ~~d'~~di ~~imi~~ assuefazione. (*Zib.* 1365, 21 July 1821)

This 'facoltà di imitare' is made of two components: the (philological) attention for details ('attenzione esatta e minuta all'oggetto e alle sue parti') and habit. Imitation is the grounding for all learning: again, as in the case of Xenophon and of Greek authors, reading is approached to learning languages, since it involves the same faculties and skills.

This comparison introduces, however, another theme, namely the fact that true imitation (and actual and profound learning) which takes place, we might say, outside of conscience and outside the learner's control. As Leopardi writes, 'anche meco stesso e senza avvedermene'. This equally happens with the enjoyment of texts.[129] Leopardi develops such consideration by recalling a passage from Alfieri's autobiography, from which he selects the expression 'matta attenzione ch'egli poneva a tutte le minuzie nelle sue prime letture e studi de' classici' (*Zib.* 1260, 1-2 July 1821). The adjective 'matto' cannot help but recall the expression 'studio matto e disperatissimo' with which Leopardi referred to his own literary apprenticeship. It has evident autobiographical nuances, as a passage of May 1822 suggests, where Leopardi notes how people with disabilities are commonly known by the name of their disability ('Il sordo, il zoppo, il gobbo, il matto tale', *Zib.* 2441). Now, this 'matta attenzione' is precisely what happens, for instance, in learning languages. When learning a new language, writes Leopardi, one usually pays attention to every single detail ('ogni menoma cosa'): still, 'intralasciato per qualche tempo lo studio di quella lingua, e perduto l'abito di quella minuta attenzione, ripigliando poi a leggere in quella lingua […], e credendo di trovarci maggior difficoltà […], vi trovate al contrario molto più spedito di prima' (*Zib.* 1260-61). This happens because, once minute control is left aside, 'leggiamo non più come scolari, ma disinvoltamente e come semplici lettori': 'non si arriva mai a leggere speditamente una lingua

[129] 'Se tu prendi a leggere un libro qualunque, il più facile ancora, o ad ascoltare un discorso il più chiaro del mondo, con un'attenzione eccessiva, e con una smodata contenzione di mente; non solo ti si rende difficile il facile, non solo ti maravigli tu stesso e ti sorprendi e ti duoli di una difficoltà non aspettata, non solo tu stenti assai più ad intendere, di quello che avresti fatto con minore attenzione, non solo tu capisci meno, ma se l'attenzione e il timore di non intendere ~~e~~o di lasciarsi sfuggire qualche cosa, è propriamente estrem~~a~~o, tu non intendi assolutamente nulla, come se tu non leggessi, e non ascoltassi, e come se la tua mente fosse del tutto intesa ad un'altro [sic] affare: perocchè dal troppo viene il nulla, e il troppo attendere ad una cosa equivale effettivamente al non attenderci, e all'avere un'altra occupazione tutta diversa, cioè la stessa attenzione. Nè tu potrai ottenere il tuo fine se non ~~ti~~ rilascerai, ed allenterai la tua mente, ponendola in uno stato naturale e rimetterai, ed appianerai la tua cura d'intendere, la quale solo in tal caso ~~potr~~ sarà utile' (*Zib.* 2274-75, 22 December 1821.).

nuova, se non quando si lascia l'intenzione di studioso per prendere quella di lettore' (*Zib.* 1261). In the same way, we may add, one does not enjoy poetry if not by identifying oneself with (along with the intention of becoming) the author. Learning means performing a role. Exactly as the mere image of Saint Louis inspires a desire for sanctity, learning a language evokes the desire of becoming a native speaker, and reading literature that of becoming a poet and a writer.

Scholarly activity is therefore a pedagogic training that one must at some point abandon, and which is however compulsory, at a first stage. 'Un uomo', writes Leopardi a month later, 'diviene eloquente a forza di legger libri eloquenti; inventivo, originale, pensatore, matematico, ragionatore, poeta, *a forza*' (*Zib.* 1541, 21 August 1821, emphasis mine). The example of other authors is eloquent. It is equally eloquent the fact that Leopardi speaks here of novelists. 'Quei romanzieri', he asserts, 'la cui fecondità ec. d'invenzione ci fa stupire, hanno per lo più letto gran quantità di romanzi, racconti ec.': this is something that can be imitated, since 'qualunque ingegno, in parità di circostanze esteriori e indipendenti dalla sua natura, sarebbe capace di acquistare, in grado per lo meno somigliante' (ibid.). Paradoxically, true originality can only be reached by a forced training in imitation:

> [...] avendo letto fra i lirici il solo Petrarca, mi pareva che dovendo scriver cose liriche, la natura non mi potesse portare a scrivere in altro stile ec. che simile a quello del Petrarca. Tali infatti mi riuscirono i primi saggi che feci in quel genere di poesia. I secondi meno simili, perchè da qualche tempo non leggeva più il Petrarca. I terzi dissimili affatto, per essermi formato ad altri modelli, o aver contratta, a forza di moltiplicare i modelli, le riflessioni ec. quella specie di maniera o di facoltà, <u>che si chiama originalità</u>. (<u>Originalità</u> quella che si contrae? e che infatti non si possiede mai se non s'è acquistata? Anche Mad. di Staël dice che bisogna leggere più che si possa per divenire <u>originale</u>. Che cosa è dunque l'originalità? facoltà acquisita, come tutte le altre, benchè questo aggiunto di acquisita ripugna dirittamente al significato e valore del suo nome.). (*Zib.* 2184-86, 28 November 1821)

The reflection leads to the paradox of 'originality' as a faculty acquired through the imitation of several styles, which requires devotion and commitment and whose final result resides in a dark zone in which an individual's own style emerges almost spontaneously:

Chiunque si è veramente formato un buono stile sa che immensa fatica gli è costato l'acquisto di quest'abitudine, quanti anni spesi unicamente in questo studio, quante riflessione profonde, quanto esercizio dedicato unicamente a ciò, quanti confronti, quante letture destinate a questo solo fine, quanti tentativi inutili. […] solamente a poco a poco dopo lunghissimi travagli, e lunghissima assuefazione gli [è] veramente riuscito di possedere il vero sensorio del bello scrivere, la scienza di tutte le minutissime parti e cagioni di esso, e finalmente l'arte di mettere in opera esso stesso quello che non senza molta difficoltà è giunto a riconoscere e sentire ne' grandi maestri, arte difficilissima ad acquistare, e ~~non~~ che non viene già dietro per nesun modo da se alla scienza dello ~~scrivere~~ stile; bensì la suppone, e perfettissima, ma questa scienza può stare e sta spessissimo senza l'arte. (*Zib.* 2725-26, 30 May 1823)

This is why, notes Leopardi already in December 1821, while writing 'giova moltissimo […] il leggere abitualmente in quel tempo degli autori di stile, di materia ec. analoga a quella che abbiamo per le mani'. This does not, however, depend on imitation but rather on the 'abitudine materiale che la mente acquista a quell tal stile. […] Tali letture in tal tempo *non sono studi, ma esercizi*, come la lunga abitudine del comporre facilita la composizione' (*Zib.* 2228, 6 December, emphasis mine).

Ora tali letture fanno appunto allora l'uffizio di quest'abitudine, la facilitano, esercitano insomma la mente in quell'operazione ch'ella ha da fare. E giovano massimamente quando ella v'è già dentro, e la sua disposizione e [sic] sul <u>traine</u> [sic] di eseguire, di applicare al fatto ec. Così leggendo un ragionatore, per quei giorni si prova una straordinaria tendenza, facilità, frequenza ec. di ragionare sopra qualunque cosa occorrente, anche menoma. Così un pensatore, così uno scrittore d'immaginazione, di sentimento (esso ci avvezza per allora a <u>sentire</u> anche da noi stessi), originale, inventivo ec. ~~(~~ E questi effetti li producono essi non in forza di modelli (giacchè ~~lip~~ li producono quando anche il lettore li disprezzi, o li consideri come tutt'altro che modelli), ma come mezzi di assuefazione. E però, massime nell'atto di comporre, bisogna fuggir le cattive letture, sia in ordine allo stile, o a qualunque altra cosa; perchè la mente senz'avvedersene si abitua a quelle maniere, per quanto le condanni, e per quanto sia abituata già a maniere diverse, abbia formato una maniera propria, ben radicata nella di lui assuefazione ec. (*Zib.* 2228-30)

While asserting this, Leopardi gives an immediate and practical example of his theory. The use of such a French word as *train* betrays a direct influence of French readings. This is just one of the many examples of the *Zibaldone*'s polyphonic plurilingualism to which Leopardi's theory of reading gives a theoretical explanation. Style contracts, more or less consciously, habits, which are more evident in such cases when borrowing is manifestly shown by the use of another language. The *Zibaldone* reproduces, from the very moment of writing, the wanderings of a mind alternately modelling itself on genres, styles, and languages. Written as it is 'a penna corrente' (*Zib.* 95), the 'scartafaccio' constructs, and actually is, the space of the very same training it theorises. The *Zibaldone*'s poly-stylistic and plurilingual dimension is strictly interconnected with its wanderings within 'the' library, meant as a physical embodiment of knowledge. These wanderings, these contacts with a multiplicity of styles and language, productively affect Leopardi's writing, in accordance with his own theory of reading. To think, for someone who has been raised in an alphabetic culture, is – for Leopardi – to think through language, mainly through words: pluristylism and plurilingualism are the only ways for avoiding the cheap effect of ideographical writing, for expressing the complexity of a thought which is radically grounded on language, and since the beginning.

> Cosa ch'io ho provato molte volte, e si vede in questi stessi pensieri scritti a penna corrente, dove ho fissato le mie idee con parole greche francesi latine, secondo che mi rispondevano più precisamente alla cosa, e mi venivano più presto trovate. Perchè una~~'cosa~~idea senza parola o modo di esp~~i~~rimerla, ci sfugge, ~~e~~o ci erra nel pensiero come indefinita e mal nota a noi medesimi che l'abbiamo concepit~~o~~a~~:~~. Colla parola prende corpo, e quasi forma visibile, e sensibile, e circoscritta. (95, 1819)

Still, in such mimesis, where is the author's self? As Prete writes, Leopardi's 'I' in the *Zibaldone*

non è un *io* definibile con i nostri termini di soggetto, perché è un *io* che si mostra quasi sempre attraverso un libro, con la biblioteca, con la citazione, con il margine e il commento, con la meditazione che lambisce un pensiero altrui e da esso è mossa fino a staccarsi e farsi autonoma. L'*io* si disloca nel margine di altri libri, di altri pensieri. [….] La presenza dell'*io* è una presenza che dobbiamo trovare sotto, scrostando; e vedremo che c'è un'appartenenza di sé a qualcosa che non è più suo.[130]

The notion of 'subject' can be further problematized by considering, for instance, that in Lacanian psychoanalysis the 'Subject' is precisely defined always within a frame of relations: with the Real (in this case the 'Library'), the Imaginary (what Prete summarises as 'qualche ricordo, qualche battuta, la voce del fratello minore, un'abitudine nella Recanati della sua infanzia, pochissime cose')[131] and the Symbolic (the *Zibaldone* as the intentional construction of a paradigmatic experience). Pierre Bayard evokes a similar problem while noticing how, in Montaigne, the distinction between quotation and self-quotation seems to disappear, since the mechanisms of forgetting confine past thoughts in the space of alterity, as much as 'other' as quotations from the ancients.[132] The act of writing 'a penna corrente' entails therefore the rhapsodic construction of Leopardi's subjectivity and authorship, intentionally retraced at the intersection of a multiplicity of styles, languages and voices. Originality is the result of an intentional mimesis. Reading does not correspond to an immersion within an abstract community of *auctoritates*,but rather to a duel with the canon whose winning prize is the possession of one's own tongue.

[130] Prete, 'Un anno di Zibaldoni e altre meraviglie'.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read,* p. 53.

CHAPTER 3

EXCERPTING, MEMORY, FORGETTING

3.a. The 'ars excerpendi' and the genre of the *Zibaldone*

One of the most debated problems about the *Zibaldone* is the influence of the Alsatian canon Joseph Anton Vogel (1756-1817) over Leopardi's initial idea for his textual experiment. A fervent traditionalist, Vogel escaped from France after having refused to swear loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy (1790), and reached the Papal States in 1794. His erudite education allowed him to carry out several historical inquiries in archives and libraries of the Marche, before being called to Recanati in 1802 with the tasks of reordering the city's archive and of writing the history of the Recanati and Loreto dioceses. He stayed in Recanati until 1814 when he moved to Loreto as a canon of the Basilica and where he died in the summer of 1817; quite curiously, in that very same summer in which Leopardi plausibly drafted the first fragments of the *Zibaldone*.[133]

Vogel's relationship with the Leopardi family, favoured by the mediation of the Marquis Filippo Solari, has been widely explored. Vogel's reputation as an erudite, as well as his reactionary ideological positions, surely played an important role in his progressive entering within the family circle. What is interesting from our point of view is, however, the singular mixture, in Vogel's intellectual profile, of an *Ancien Régime* cultural background together with remarkably post-Revolutionary features. From this point of view, Vogel appears as a

[133] For information on Vogel's life and background I make general reference to Marcello Verdenelli's introductory essay to Giuseppe Antonio Vogel, *Epistolario* (Ancona: Transeuropa, 1993), pp. 7-33, and to Vogel's biographical profile on p. 34-36.

peculiar figure in the Bourbon Restoration Papal States, that can be approached to Monaldo Leopardi in many respects.

Just like Monaldo, Vogel seems to be fascinated by the organisation and hierarchy of knowledge granted by the library as a physical and mental structure. As Francesco Maria Raffaelli writes in 1857, since Vogel

> conosceva, che le biblioteche, per essere veramente utili, e corrispondenti al loro scopo, vogliono essere stabilite in edifici vasti, e bene illuminati affinché possano accogliere la massa sempre crescente delle dovizie, che sono destinati a contenere, ed offrano un commodo sito agli studiosi, che le frequentano, così volle che anzi tutto si stabilissero quattro ampie sale per collocarvi nella prima in bene adattati armadi ciò, che spetta alle belle lettere, alle arti, alla scienza filosofica, la seconda volle destinata alla storia, ed agli studi, che a questa si riferiscono, la terza alle scienze sacre, la quarta alla giurisprudenza.[134]

Vogel's taxonomical imperative is symptomatically close to that of Monaldo, which partially explains Vogel's frequent visits to the Recanati library where he had the opportunity to contact the young Giacomo and, plausibly, to shape his first classical readings. The Latin references found in Vogel's correspondence, which have been reconstructed by Sergio Sconocchia, show a remarkable closeness to Leopardi's first classical readings: Virgil, Horace, Cicero and Ovid.[135] The influence of the Alsatian canon over Leopardi's early formation, however, is still an open problem. After the publication of Vogel's letters by Giuseppe Cugnoni at the end of the nineteenth century, this hypothesis was maintained by Vossler (1925), downsized by Timpanaro in his recognition of the sources and inspiration of Leopardi's philology and later reaffirmed, with more detailed argumentations, by Maria Corti

[134] Francesco Maria Raffaelli, *Comentario storico su la vita e gli scritti del canonico Giuseppe Antonio Vogel* (Recanati: Morici e Badaloni, 1857), p. 8.
[135] Sergio Sconocchia, 'Il Vogel e la cultura classica', in Vogel, *Epistolario*, pp. vii-ix.

in her edition of Leopardi's writings of youth.[136] The most controversial question, nevertheless, concerns the very notion of 'zibaldone'. The hypothesis that the idea of a 'zibaldone' was transmitted to Leopardi by Vogel is grounded in a letter of November 27 1807, written by Vogel to the Marquis Filippo Solari. Vogel replies to his correspondent's request of writing for him an 'erudita dissertazione sopra i Zibaldoni'. He will not be able to do so, but he will attempt anyway to 'discorrere con animo […] tranquillo sulla materia'.[137] Vogel has been therefore traditionally considered as the first one to introduce the concept of 'zibaldone' in the Leopardi circle. This assumption that has however been questioned by Emilio Peruzzi in his edition of the text. Peruzzi's argument is basically founded on three considerations. Firstly, the discrepancy of Leopardi's actual *Zibaldone* with the definition given by Vogel in his 1807 letter: 'l'ordine e la nitidezza della pagina' of Leopardi's work is radically different from the shapelessness of the writings that Vogel had in mind.[138] Secondly, Leopardi could have in mind a more direct reference, namely Francesco Cancellieri's *Dissertazione intorno agli uomini dotati di gran memoria* (1815), in which Leopardi himself was included and where the notion of 'zibaldone' was equally evoked:

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[136] Giuseppe Cugnoni had published some of Vogel's letters in his edition of Leopardi's *Opere inedite*, 2 vols. (Halle: Niemeyer, 1880). In 1925 Karl Vossler maintained that Vogel had been Leopardi's first 'vero maestro': *Leopardi*, transl. by Tomaso Gnoli (Naples: Ricciardi, 1925), p. 25. This argument was supported by Francesco Moroncini in his edition of Leopardi's *Epistolario*, 3 vols. (Florence: Le Monnier, 1934-41), vol. I, p. 52 n. 4, and later by Francesco Flora, who brought back the first hint of the idea of 'zibaldone' to the Vogel's influence; cf. Giacomo Leopardi, *Le poesie e le prose*, ed. by Francesco Flora, 2 vols. (Milan: Mondadori, 1973), vol, I, p. lvii. This hypothesis was criticised by Timpanaro, *La filologia di Giacomo Leopardi*, p. 55, and reaffirmed by Maria Corti, cf. *'Entro dipinta gabbia'*, p. x. Pacella is cautious: 'Leopardi conosceva senz'altro il significato di ['zibaldone'] attraverso le proprie letture', without assuming any direct influence of Vogel's (Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, vol. I, p. xxix). A general reconstruction of the quarrel can be found in Marcello Verdenelli, 'Cronistoria dell'idea leopardiana di "Zibaldone"', *Il Veltro. Rivista della civiltà italiana*, 5-6 (1987), pp. 591-620.

[137] Cf. Vogel, *Epistolario*, pp. 92-98, p. 92.

[138] Emilio Peruzzi, 'Presunti antecedenti', in Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, ed. by Peruzzi, vol. I, pp. xix-xxiii, p. xx.

Abbiamo di fatti la costante pratica de' *Letterati* più celebri di ogni età, i quail coll'idea di preparer *materiali* ad alcune *Opere*, che fossero per *produrre*, o per avere in pronto le *materie* più interessanti di *contese Letterarie, di fatti istorici*, o di *punti dottrinali*, che potessero un giorno venire loro a taglio, formarono i loro *Memoriali*, o vogliam dire *Zibaldoni*, ne' quail le registravano, secondo le varie *Lettere* dell'*Alfabeto*, per avere maggior facilità di rintracciarle, scrivendole per lo più da una parte sola; affinché volendo, potessero tagliare le stesse carte, e disporle con ordine, senza perdere ciò, che fosse stato scritto anche dall'altra parte, o far la doppia fatica di ricopiarlo, qualora occorresse.[139]

The third reason is that the notion itself of 'zibaldone' appears, in Leopardi, very late, namely in the October of 1827, when Leopardi uses the word for the first time in drafting the table of contents for the book. As Peruzzi summarises, 'la miscellanea leopardiana non *nasce* come zibaldone; se mai, *diventa* zibaldone, ma non in senso tecnico'.[140]

For aproximately ten years the *Zibaldone* remains therefore an un-titled book, in which no clear indication is given about its genre. More interestingly, when obliged to give one, Leopardi returns to a notion which was circulating in his formation years, either borrowed from Vogel or from Cancellieri as influences of his adolescence (although, as Peruzzi writes, 'non in senso tecnico': a distinction that I will examine more closely in the following pages). Surely, Cancellieri seems a more philologically recognisable source. His book was in the Recanati library and Leopardi had surely read it, while Vogel's definition of 'zibaldone' is only to be found in a letter written to someone else when Leopardi was nine. Still, a closer analysis of both sources may allow us to put the question about influence in perspective. Actually, the cultural environment to which both Vogel and Cancellieri refer happens to be the same. In his letter to Solari, Vogel writes:

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[139] Francesco Cancellieri, *Dissertazione intorno agli uomini dotati di gran memoria ed a quelli divenuti smemorati con un'appendice delle biblioteche degli scrittori sopra gli eruditi precoci, la memoria artificiale, l'arte di trascegliere e di notare ed il giuoco degli scacchi* (Rome: Bourlie, 1815), p. 107.

[140] Emilio Peruzzi, 'Presunti antecedenti', p. xxii.

Ho letto in patria una bella operetta del pio e dotto gesuita *Drexelio*, intitolata: *Aurifodina* sive libellus de arte excerpendi. […] Un certo *Vincenzo Placcio* uomo eruditissimo fece un grosso tomo sopra l'arte di fare estratti, ed esamina criticamente tutti i sistemi, e metodi proposti da altri sino all'età sua. Il gran Locke *Principe de' metafisici* inventò anch'egli un metodo […]. Un celebre uomo Martino Vogelio amburghese inventò […] uno *Scrigno Zibaldonico* assai comodo. […] Da questo Vogelio imparò il nostro *Leibnizio* a far Zibaldoni […].[141]

In his dissertation, Cancellieri reconstructs the same genealogy, in the form of a reasoned bibliography:

Terminerò adunque *la prima Parte* di questo mio *Opuscolo*, […] indicando [ai *Giovani* studiosi] gli *Autori*, che hanno specialmente trattato del modo di formare questi *Promptuarj*, e *Repertorj*, che possano nelle occasioni server loro di ajuto, e di risvegliamento.[…] *Hieremiae Drexelii* Aurifodina Artium, et Scientiarum omnium excerpendi solertia omnibus Litterarum amantibus monstrata, cui anexa est *Mart. Kergeri* methodus excerpendi, *Drexeliana* succinctior. Erf[urt] ap. Geor. Mullerum 1670. 16. et Naum[berg] ap. Crist. Kolb 1765. 16. […] *Jean Locke* Lettre contenant une methode nouvelle de dresser des Recueuils. dans la Bibliotheque Universelle de l'an. 1686. T. II. P. 316-340, et dans les Oeuvres de *Locke* T. II. P. 118. Amst[erdam] 1732. 8. ed in Pesaro in Casa Gavelli 1771. fol.*Vinc. Placcii* de Arte excerpendi Liber singularis, quo genera, et praecepta excerpendi, ab aliis huc usque tradita omnia, novis accessionibus aucta exhibentur; speciatim Scrinii Lirrerati inventum peculiare, ex manuscripto Anonymi emendatum exhibetur, una cum Historia excerptorum. Holmiae, et Hamb[urg] ap. Godofr. Liebezeit 1689. 8.[142]

Both Vogel and Cancellieri are referring to the tradition of the so-called 'ars excerpendi', a Latin expression translated by Cancellieri as 'arte del trascegliere, e del notare',[143] and by Vogel as 'arte di fare estratti'. Strictly connected to the 'art of memory', the 'ars excerpendi' was the art of taking excerpts from readings and of classifying them for future purposes.

The origins of the 'ars excerpendi' were rooted in classical tradition. Two of the most quoted *auctoritates* on the topic were Seneca and Pliny the Younger. While Seneca had asserted the necessity of isolating passages while reading for future needs (*Epist. ad. Luc.* 84),

[141] Vogel, *Epistolario*, p. 93.
[142] Francesco Cancellieri, *Dissertazione*, pp. 112-13.
[143] Ibid., p. 108.

Pliny had recalled how his uncle used to take systematic quotations ('nihil enim legit, quod non excerperet', *Epist.*, VI, 20, 5) and he himself had taken the habit of always keeping a pen at hand for the same purpose (IX, 36, 6). The 'ars excerpendi' was mainly used by rhetoricians in order to establish collections of 'loci communes' for the composition of discourses, and, as such, it was mentioned in several texts that Leopardi knew well, such as Quintilianus's *Institutio Oratoria* and Cicero's *De oratore*.[144]

Still, as Alberto Cevolini correctly acknowledges, the 'ars excerpendi' evoked by Vogel is, although endowed with a classical genealogy, definitely a modern phenomenon.[145] The first extensive text about the 'ars' is Jeremias Drexel's *Aurifodina*, published in Antwerp in 1638, but the genealogy of the 'ars excerpendi' is definitely German, namely the environment to which Vogel refers while speaking of 'our' Leibniz. The so-called 'Hamburg School' of Joachim Jungius and Johann Adolf Tasse inspires Vincent Placcius's foundational treatise *De arte excerpendi* (Hamburg 1689) and Martin Fogel's works, which are mainly known since they influenced Leibniz's way of taking notes. The zenith of the 'ars excerpendi' is reached throughout the whole Europe at the end of the Seventeenth century with such works as Daniel Georg Morhof's *Polyhistor*. Such contributions emerged in the environment of the Jesuits as Francesco Sacchini's *Libretto sul modo di leggere libri con profitto* and Ranieri Carsughi's *Ars bene scribendi*, and with Locke's *Méthode nouvelle de dresser des Recueuils comminiquée par l'Auteur* (1686).

The 'ars excerpendi' is therefore strictly connected with early modern press and with the birth of the modern book as a form of 'artificial memory'. The transition towards a silent and visual way of reading and the new and anonymous public of printed books determine the

[144] Cf. Alberto Cevolini, *De arte excerpendi. Imparare a dimenticare nella modernità* (Florence: Olschki, 2006), pp. 11-17.
[145] For a history of the 'ars excerpendi' cf. ibid., pp. 113-29.

emergence of several factors which literally reshape the book as a visible embodiment of knowledge: punctuation and orthography, page number and indexes, and systemic order in the disposition of the book's contents.[146] In parallel, the notion of erudition undergoes a significant swerve, from the predominance of the medieval and Renaissance mnemonic model (finding its area of application in a narrow corpus of *auctoritates*) to the confrontation with a constantly evolving and potentially unlimited library, so that curiosity becomes the predominant gift of the erudite and cultivated person.[147] Eventually, as Cevolini writes, the invention of the press determines 'il passaggio dalla spazializzazione alla progressiva temporalizzazione del sapere, un processo che comporta l'inevitabile dissoluzione dell'antica differenza fra *tempus* ed *aeternitas*'. In modern times, 'la distinzione che guida la produzione e il trattamento del sapere è quella che separa il passato dal futuro, il tempo di ciò che è noto dal tempo di ciò che ancora non si conosce'.[148] The tangible manifestation of this 'temporalisation' is precisely the 'zibaldone', as a liminal work that is situated between what has already been and what is still to be written.

The contributions of Vogel and of Cancellieri appear then to be late and untimely acknowledgments of a sub-culture, that of the 'libri sull'*arte excerpendi*', whose 'parabola', at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, 'può dirsi praticamente esaurita'.[149] Nevertheless, in the Papal States of the early nineteenth century, the German 'ars excerpendi' can still be proposed as a modality of confrontation with the library, through which proliferation of information of modern times can be profitably faced. As Vogel puts it,

[146] Ibid., pp. 39-48.
[147] Ibid., pp. 49-62.
[148] Ibid., p. 61.
[149] Ibid., p. 126.

Gli autori tedeschi vogliono che per ogni scienza si faccia uno Zibaldone a parte […] [Lo *Scrigno Zibaldonico* di Martino Vogelio] era diviso in molti tiratori filologico, filosofico, matematico etc., ed in ciascun tiratorio vi erano molte cassette e sottodivisioni. Scrivendo dunque i suoi pensieri, estratti etc. sopra tante cedolette separate, coperte di lettere etc., metteva poi ogni cosa al luogo suo, e così senza la minima difficoltà e senza indice ritrovava le sue idee ottimamente classificate. [Leibniz] scrisse le sue meditazioni, e annotazioni sopra cartucce volanti, delle quali si pretende esistono ancora alcuni milioni nella biblioteca non mi ricordo se di Gottinga, o di Wolfenbuttel. Per una fatalità deplorabile non usò lo scrigno, o vero questo si è smarrito; e i pensieri dell'uomo impareggiabile son ricaduti nel caos.[150]

The 'zibaldoni', writes Vogel, are 'scrigni' in which 'di tempo in tempo' one can progressively include 'note de' libri, manoscritti […] osservazioni, dissertazioni': the 'zibaldoni' are characterised by a remarkable heterogeneousness of materials, since both 'pensieri' (the collector's own thoughts) and 'estratti' (the fragments extrapolated from the library) can be equally included and indistinctively juxtaposed. Moreover, in his letter Vogel employs the expression 'di tempo in tempo' twice in order to underline the methodical and day-by-day construction of the 'zibaldone'.[151] The patient and progressive work of accumulation is necessary to the quick and eclectic composition of future works: the 'zibaldoni' are 'magazeni' in which 'si truov[a] […] preparato un abbondantissimo materiale' from which it is possible 'in breve tempo dare alla luce molti volume sopra materie anche disparate'.[152] The metaphor of darkness and brightness is specifically evoked. The dark and hidden work of collection, as an attempt at restructuring of a cultural chaos, is opposed to the bright organisation of the accomplished piece of writing. The 'zibaldoni' are laboratories 'da cui escono alla giornata tante belle opere di ogni genere di letteratura; come dal caos sortirono tempo fa il sole, e la luna e le stelle'.[153]

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[150] Vogel, *Epistolario,* p. 93.
[151] 'le *sottises* di cui di tempo in tempo si occupava la mente [di Voltaire]' (ibid., p. 92); '[i Bollandisti] riponevano [nelle cassette] le osservazioni, dissertazioni che di tempo in tempo andavano facendo' (pp. 94-95).
[152] Ibid., pp. 94-95.
[153] Ibid., pp. 92-93.

At the beginning of his letter, Vogel laments the absence of univocal definitions for the concept of 'zibaldone' whose etymology he would like to retrace. More specifically, Vogel regrets the fact of not having dictionaries at hand in order to give some sense to the myriad of synonyms and floating definitions that are employing by several authors in order to define the same kind of texts:

> Quanto mi dispiace di non avere il Menagio, il Du Cange, il Ferrari, il Martinio, il Muratori, il glossario di Spencer, il dizionario della lingua etrusca del Passeri o del Lanzi etc. per rintracciare l'origine ed il vero significato della parola Zibaldone? […] Azzarderò solamente la coniettura, che possa essere un sinonimo di *Caos scritto* […]. Alcuni invece di Zibaldone dicono *Taccuino* che fu il nome di un onesto stampatore veneto, che ci diede la bella edizione delle Prose del Bembo del 1525. Non so perché il medesimo in oggi significa un libro di ricordi, o di estratti, o di pensieri sconnessi. Voltaire chiamava il suo Taccuino suo *Sottisier*, perché vi scriveva le *sottises* di cui di tempo in tempo si occupava la sua gran mente. Sbagliò di dare al Taccuino un tal nome che meglio conveniva alla collezione delle sue opere, all'immortale enciclopedia, e se Ella pur vuole così, a qualsiasi libreria.[154]

Again, the 'zibaldone' has by definition a heterogeneous and fragmentary content: 'pensieri sconnessi', or even 'sottises', which can be even considered as an antecedent to the 'cognizioni inutili' that will later haunt Leopardi's reflection.[155] The possible definitions for this genre are many. Vogel enumerates them with systematicity, and maybe not without 'un certo atteggiamento di esasperazione':[156] 'caos scritti, taccuini, o sottisiers, adversaria, excerpta, pugillares, commentaria etc.'[157]

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[154] Ibid., p. 92.
[155] In 1826 Leopardi projects an 'Enciclopedia o Dizionario delle cognizioni inutili, e delle cose che non si sanno […] Enciclopedia di ciance (o di passatempo ec.)' (*TPP*, p. 1112); the same sketch is in the later but undated draft n. XI, 'Enciclopedia delle cognizioni inutili, e delle cose che non si sanno' (ibid.). The same tone can be found in the programmatic draft for the magazine *Lo Spettatore fiorentino*, sketched in 1832: 'Confessiamo schiettamente che il nostro Giornale non avrà nessuna utilità' (*TPP*, pp. 1032-33, p. 1032).
[156] Cevolini, *De arte excerpendi*, p. 126.
[157] Vogel, *Epistolario*, p. 92.

The same terminological variety can be observed in Cancellieri. In treating of the 'ars excerpendi', Cancellieri speaks about the necessity of 'stendere opportune *Annotazioni* sopra tutte le *Opere*, che si vanno leggendo'. These would be 'distese *memorie*' that will allow to recall all the information needed at a later phase. Such collections of notes have many names, among which Cancellieri mentions Pliny the Younger's *pugillares*, '*Memoriali* […] *Zibaldoni,* in latino detti *Adversaria*',[158] '*Diar[i]*', '*memorie*',[159] '*Promptuarj*' and '*Repertorj*'.[160]

In both the potential sources from which Leopardi could borrow the notion of 'zibaldone', this notion therefore appears to be fully inserted within a constellation of writing practices, variously intersected with the tradition of the *ars memorialis* and which since antiquity had constructed the rules of reading, 'extracting' and noting. Two hypotheses should subsequently be verified. Firstly, if despite of the later use by Leopardi of the term 'zibaldone', such constellation emerges in his writings and can be connected to his cultural operation. Secondly, we should investigate to what extent the quoting practice of the 'ars excerpendi' tradition affects Leopardi's use of quotations, and is incorporated and metamorphosed within Leopardi's thought.

3.b. 'Non è una storia, ma un Diario o Giornale': *hypomnēmata* and *commentaria*

[158] Ibid., 107.
[159] Ibid., 111.
[160] Ibid., 112. We can note the absence of the notion of *pastissage*, which is present in Montaigne's *Éssais* and which is considered as a pivotal one by Pacella, although without any textual grounding in Leopardi's oeuvre: see Leopardi, *Zibaldone di pensieri*, vol. I, p. xxx.

At the beginning of January 1821, Leopardi analyses in the *Zibaldone* the philological problem of the absence of any 'proem' in Xenophon's *Anabasis*:

È cosa notata e famosa presso gli antichi (non credo però gli antichissimi, ma più secoli dopo Senofonte) che Senofonte non premise nessun preambolo alla *Kyrou anabásei*, sebbene dal secondo libro in poi, premetta libro per libro, il Laerzio dice un proemio, ma veramente un epilogo ~~e~~o riassunto brevissimo delle cose dette prima. Vedi il Laerz. in Xenoph. Luciano, de scribenda histor. ec. E Luciano dice che molti per imitarlo non ponevano alcun proemio alle loro istorie. Ed aggiunge, *ouk eidótes ōs dynámei ~~tinà pr~~* (potentiâ) *tinà prooímiá esti lelēthóta toùs polloùs*. (*Zib.* 466, 2 January 1821)

Still, Leopardi remarks that this is not a real problem ('io qui non vedo maraviglia nessuna'). The reason is to be found in the literary genre of the *Anabasis*:

Esaminate bene quell'opera: non è una storia, ma un Diario o Giornale [...] di quella Spedizione. Infatti procede giorno per giorno, segnando le marce, contando le parasanghe ec. ec. infatti ~~nel~~ ~~il~~ l'opera si chiude con una lista effettiva o somma dei giorni, spazi percorsi, nazioni ec. lista indipendente dal resto, ~~anche~~ per la sintassi. E di queste enumerazioni ne sono sparse per tutta l'opera. Non doveva dunque avere un proemio, non essendo propriamente in forma ~~d' di~~ d'opera, ~~d~~ma di Commentario o ~~m~~Memoriale, ossiano ricordi, e materiali. (*Zib.* 466-67)

The same considerations, Leopardi continues, can be made about Caesar's *De Bello Gallico* and *De Bello Civile*:

Chi si vuol far maraviglia di Senofonte, perchè non se la fa di Cesare? Il quale comincia i suoi Commentari <u>de bello G.</u> e <u>C.</u> ex abrupto, appunto come Senofonte. E questo perchè non erano Storia ma commentari. Nè pone alcun preambolo a nessuno de' libri in cui sono divisi. Così Irzio. Eccetto ~~una~~ una specie di avvertimento indirizzato a Balbo e premesso al lib.8. <u>de b. G.</u> (il quale era necessario non per l'opera in se, ma per la circostanza, ch'egli n~~e~~'era il continuatore) ~~tanto~~ nè quel libro, nè quello <u>de b. Alexandrino</u>, nè quello <u>de b. Africano</u>, nè quello d'autore incerto <u>de b. Hispaniensi</u> non hanno alcun preambolo, ed entrano subito in materia. Da queste osservazioni deducete 1. un'altra prova che Senofonte è il vero autore della K. A. non Temistogene ec. trattandosi di un giornale, che non poteva essere scritto o almeno abbozzato se non <u>in præsentia</u>, e dallo stesso Generale (come i commentarii di Cesare), o almeno da qualche suo intimo confidente. Questa proprietà, ~~e~~di essere cioè scritta da un testimonio di vista, anzi dal principale attore e centro degli avvenimenti non è comune a

nessun'altra opera storica greca, che ci rimanga, anzi a nessun'antica, fuorchè ai commentarii di Cesare. Perciò ella è singolarmente preziosa anche per questo capo, e propria più delle altre a darci la vera idea de' costumi, pensieri, natura degli antichi, e de' loro fatti; come le lettere di Cicerone in altro genere di scrittura, sono la più recondita e intima sorgente della storia di quei tempi. (*Zib.* 466-68).

Leopardi is here approaching a crucial problem of classical philology, whose first systematic articulation can be found in Willamowitz's *Einleitung in die Tragödie* (1889). As Rudolf Pfeiffer comments, according to Willamowitz only tragedies were the very first Greek books (*biblia*), while other texts were not but preliminary writings, meant to be aids for memory (*hypomnēmata*). As Pfeiffer emphasises, the word *hypomnēmaton* 'non designò mai uno scritto autonomo; può riferirsi a note che richiamano un fatto udito o visto nel passato oppure ad appunti o a note raccolte come schizzo per un libro futuro oppure a note esegetiche di qualche altro scritto, cioè un commentario'.[161]

Commentarius is precisely the Latin translation of *hypomnēmaton*: a genre denoting, according to Michel Foucault, the emergence of a 'souci de soi' in ancient culture,[162] and widely recuperated in contemporary theory in order to question the relationship between memory and writing, and eventually the 'geographies of knowledge' taking place via mnemotechniques, hypertext and reading/writing practices (Bernard Stiegler).[163] Already in Leopardi, however, the *commentaria-hypomnēmata* seems to cross the problems of memory

[161] Rudolf Pfeiffer, *Storia della filologia classica. Dalle origini alla fine dell'età ellenistica*, ed. by Marcello Gigante, transl. by Marcello Gigante and Salvatore Cerasuolo (Naples: Macchiaroli, 1973), p. 79.
[162] Michel Foucault, 'Self Writing', in Id., *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997), pp. 207-221.
[163] See Bernard Stiegler, 'Les temps de la lecture et les nouveaux instruments de la mémoire' (1990) (http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/1935) ;'Annotation, navigation, édition électronique. Vers une géographie de la connaissance' (1993); < http://arsindustrialis.org/node/1937 >; 'Nanomutations, hypomnemata and grammatisation' (2006) <http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/2937>; 'Anamnesis and Hypomnesis' <http://www.arsindustrialis.org/node/2923>. Both Stiegler and Foucault have widely focused on Epictetus' *Handbook*, and it would be interesting, I think, to insert Leopardi's use of such a text in this debate.

and writing, of autobiography and fragmentariness, and through the mediation of the 'ars excerpendi' tradition. 'Diario', 'Giornale', 'Commentario' and 'Memoriale' are all terms that had been connected to the notion of 'zibaldone' both by Vogel and Cancellieri ('*Memoriali*, o vogliam dire *Zibaldoni*'). Equally, the juxtaposition of 'ricordi' and 'materiali' repeats Vogel's mentioning of 'ricordi […] estratti […] pensieri sconnessi'. As Leopardi underlines, the *Anabasis* follows a day-by-day structure ('giorno per giorno'), an expression that recalls Vogel's 'di tempo in tempo', and is concluded by an indexing which is structurally close to the taxonomic practices of the 'ars excerpendi' ('lista effettiva o somma dei giorni, spazi percorsi, nazioni ec. lista indipendente dal resto, per la sintassi'). Eventually, Leopardi stresses the subjective factor of the 'ars excerpendi', remarking how *commentaria* should necessarily be written by 'un testimonio di vista, anzi dal principale attore e centro degli avvenimenti', and thus directly questioning the Greek notion of history and of the point of view of the historian-witness.

Far before the actual use of the word 'zibaldone' in order to define his textual experiment, Leopardi therefore reveals a deep reflection about the 'ars excerpendi' and the multiplicity of names given to its textual outcomes. This conjecture might be confirmed by the fact that, in the very summer of 1817 in which he begins drafting his manuscript, Leopardi writes to Giordani:

> Voi sapete quanto fossero in uso presso gli antichi quelle che i Greci 'Egloghe', o 'Parecbole' o 'Crestomazie', i latini 'Excerpta', e noi chiamiamo 'Spogli' o con moderno vocabolo 'Estratti', come più ordinariamente s'usa. E v'è pur notissimo che questi estratti forse più spesso che in altra guisa si faceano così. Qualche studioso leggendo qualche opera, si facea dal principio a notare per uso suo o anche d'altrui i passi che gli pareano più osservabili, talora copiando per disteso, talora grossolanamente ristringendo, e per iscansar la fatica inutile di cercar nuove parole, ritenendo il più che potea di quelle dell'autore.[164]

[164] Giacomo Leopardi, *Scritti filologici (1817-1832)*, ed. by Giuseppe Pacella and Sebastiano Timpanaro (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969), pp. 15-16 (letter to Giordani of 7 July 1817).

It is possible that the first idea of the *Zibaldone* is conceived while thinking about this model. The book would consequently be a space for sketching fragments, collecting reading notes and quotations, and for elaborating 'systems'. The habit of dating pages, begun in January 1820, intensifies the proximity of the *Zibaldone* with the *commentaria*-genre, making of the text a 'diario', 'giornale', 'commentario' or 'memoriale' composed 'day by day'. From another perspective, the presence/absence of a 'proem' to the *Zibaldone*, proposed as a *crux* to Leopardian criticism by an ambiguous passage of the *Ricordi d'infanzia e d'adolescenza*,[165] seems to suggest between the lines the tension between a formless series of *commentaria* and a finished and accomplished book.

Three phenomena are still in my opinion extremely relevant in order to understand the complexity of Leopardi's operation. First of all, Leopardi never makes reference to the Baroque tradition of the 'ars excerpendi' but rather seems to constantly root it back to its classical heritage. His notion of *commentaria* is clearly the ancient one, in the same way as that of 'estratti' is openly used as a synonym for the Greek genre of 'chrestomathies'. Additionally, in the *Zibaldone*, Leopardi adopts a hybrid strategy both in relation to classical tradition and to that of seventeenth-century 'ars excerpendi'. If the 'ancients' conceived excerpting as a basically cutting-pasting practice, the Baroque 'ars excerpendi' had ultimately dismissed the practice of quoting as a loss of time. Drexel had asserted that 'non vanno trascritt[e] per intero le cose notevoli che si estraggono dai libri, ma solo i riferimenti all'autore, al libro e al numero di pagina in cui si trova la notizia o l'informazione che s'intende conservare'.[166] The same rule was recommended by Vogel: 'Negli Zibaldoni [Ella]

[165] On this problem see Felici, *La luna nel cortile*, pp. 25-26.
[166] Quoted in Cevolini, *De arte excerpendi*, pp. 118-19.

non trascriverà mai niente dei libri della propria libreria, che questo è perdita di tempo'.[167] Presupposing the 'univocità dell'universo testuale di riferimento'[168] granted by press and public libraries, such technique is at the origin of modern quotation conventions. At the same time, it determines the role of *commentaria*-'zibaldoni' as private notes and laboratories for future works. Leopardi's position is quite different. While mostly adopting very precise quotation conventions, he preserves the practice of citing as an essential part of argumentation, and as the ground itself of his argumentative strategies. Leopardi's *Zibaldone* is not only a laboratory, placed in a liminal zone between the library and potential future works but is somehow, already, the work-to-come, constantly shifting between accomplishment and fragmentariness.

The third consideration can be associated with a passage of Vogel's letter to Solari: 'io non mi faccio tante formalità. Imbratto i margini de' libri quando sono miei, e gli interstizi delle line e de' paragrafi colle mie annotazioni […]. Gli estratti poi li scrivo senza alcun metodo né indice'.[169] It is hard to imagine a vocabulary so drastically divergent from Leopardi's whose notions of writing and style appear to be subterraneanly rooted in Christian ethics: 'nella perfezione dello stile,' writes D'Intino, 'e in quella dell'opera a stampa come oggetto assoluto, privo di mende e vizi, si incarna letterariamente il perfetto cristiano'.[170] The *Zibaldone* is conceived with the same spirit: 'un diario esclusivamente intellettuale, anzitutto, con *entries* che sono o discorsi ragionatissimi, ben strutturati e formalmente curati, oppure notizie, dati, citazioni; ma sempre di una precisione e – per usare il suo termine – *perfezione* stupefacente'.[171] The point is that the 'zibaldone' of the 'ars excerpendi' tradition was

[167] Vogel, *Epistolario*, p. 94.
[168] Cevolini, *De arte excerpendi*, p. 119.
[169] Vogel, *Epistolario*, p. 94.
[170] D'Intino, 'Errore, ortografia e autobiografia in Leopardi e Stendhal'.
[171] Ibid.

considered as a transitory object, situated between the plural world of printed books and the future book to be printed: its domain was that of quickness and fleetingness, its model the repertory and the warehouse, and its ideal and only reader the author himself. Leopardi's text shows, as we have seen, a far more complex structure. Although being a form of private writing, and although fostered with as much of jealousy and care, the *Zibaldone* is, instead, somehow and obscurely, conceived as a book since the beginning and somehow evoking an implicit and impalpable reader (who could be maybe identified with Leopardi's personal neuroses). Moreover, the *Zibaldone* is conceived, as we have seen, as an answer to those factors that had determined the birth itself of the 'ars excerpendi' as a symptom of modernity, and that the 'second printing revolution' had intensified: transition from a basically oral culture to written modalities of transmission of knowledge; undervaluation of memory in favour of oblivion; exponential multiplication of modern readers; problems of orthography, punctuation, indexing and in general of book-making; organization of knowledge in 'systems' and systematic practices of philosophical argumentation;[172] necessity for intellectual curiosity (what will be called *flânerie*); temporalisation of knowledge.

To complete Peruzzi's correct judgment, we can hence conclude that the *Zibaldone* is not a 'zibaldone' 'in senso tecnico' because it is, somehow, a *self-conscious* 'zibaldone'. It is conscious, in other words, of the problems determining the emergence, via the 'ars excerpendi', of the visualisation of culture as an archive, of the necessity of dissecting the canon and of embodying the author's laboratory in the visible form of a *brouillon*. In

[172] 'Il concetto di *sistema* comincia ora [dopo l'invenzione della stampa] la sua carriera semantica. […] Bisogna […] filosofare in modo non più "testuale", come avevano fatto i medievali, bensì "sistematico". Non occorre più, in altri termini, restare aderenti ai testi fissati dalla tradizione, replicando quella deferenza che aveva caratterizzato tutta la precedente gestione del sapere e che aveva trovato nel commentario il suo genere letterario più consono. L'autore adesso è libero di sganciarsi dal passato e confrontarsi con la tradizione in una prospettiva storica, in vista della produzione di qualche novità' (Cevolini, *De arte excerpendi*, p. 44).

analyzing the fracture of modernity, the *Zibaldone* somehow operates a self-analysis about the genre to which it itself belongs and about the problem itself of a distinction between genres. Both in its content and in its formal aspects, the *Zibaldone* questions such problems of modern culture as those of accomplishment and fragmentariness, of memory and the book, and of quotation policy and organisation of knowledge.

3.c. Formlessness, Accomplishment and the Burial of the Dead

The day after having sketched the note on Xenophon's and Caesar's proems, Leopardi challenges an apparently different topic:

> Venga un filosofo, e mi dica. Se ora si trovassero le ossa eo le ceneri di Omero o di Virgilio ec. il sepolcro ec. quelle ceneri che merito avrebbero realmente, e secondo la secca ragione? Che cosa parteciperebbero dei pregi, delle virtù, della gloria ec. di Omero ec.? Tolte le illusioni, e gl'inganni, a che servirebbero? Che utile reale se ne trarrebbe? Se dunque, trovatele, qualcuno, le dispergesse e perdesse, o profanasse disprezzasse ec. che torto avrebbe in realtà? anzi non oprerebbe secondo la vera ed esatta ragione? Come dunque meriterebbe il biasimo, l'esecrazione degli uomini civili? E pur quella si chiamerebbe barbarie. Dunque la ragione non è barbara? Dunque la civiltà dell'uomo sociale e delle nazioni, non si fonda, non si compone, non consiste essenzialmente negli errori e nelle illusioni? Lo stesso dite generalmente della cura de' cadaveri, dell'onore de' sepolcri ec. (*Zib.* 471-72, 3 January 1821)

This note concerns the basic uselessness of mourning practices, once examined from a uniquely rational point of view. As soon as pure reason has demonstrated the irrational nature of every form of worship towards the dead, the Enlightenment assumption about mourning and burial practices as the origins of civilisation can be turned into a revaluation of 'illusions' as the veritable foundations of human development.

The same consideration is further developed in a longer passage of 15 September 1823 (*Zib.* 3435-40). Leopardi's point of departure is a consideration found in Algarotti's *Pensieri*:

'Quel denaro che da noi si spende in tabacchiere, e in astucchi, gli antichi lo spendevano in busti e statue, e dove per una vittoria si fa ora giuocare un fuoco di artifizio, essi muravano un arco di trionfo. Algarotti, Pensieri, pensiero 13' (*Zib.* 3439). The quotation from Algarotti is preceded by a consideration on mourning practices of the 'ancients'. In approaching the Romantic theme of ruins and funeral monuments,[173] Leopardi reflects on the aspiration of ancient buildings towards eternity. Nevertheless, the habits of burying the dead and erecting funeral monuments are seen as intrinsically counter-natural practices, invented by 'poets' in order to preserve public health and social security.

Natura insegna ~~co~~ il curare e onorare i cadaveri di quelli che in vita ci furon cari o conoscenti per sangue o per circostanze ec. e l'onorar quelli di chi fu in vita onorato ec. [...] Ma ella non insegna di seppellirli nè di abbruciarli, nè di torceli in altro modo davanti agli occhi. Anzi a questo la natura ripugna, perchè il separarci perpetuamente da' cadaveri de' nostri~~,~~ è, naturalmente parlando, separazione più dolorosa che la morte loro […]. Ma d'altra parte il lasciare i cadaveri imputridire sopra terra e nelle proprie abitazioni, volendoseli conservare dappresso e presenti, è mortifero, e dannoso ai privati e alla repubblica. I poeti, oltre all'avere insegnato che nella morte sopravvive una parte dell'uomo, anzi la principale e quella che costituìisce la persona, e che questa parte va in luogo a' vivi non accessibile e a lei destinato, onde vennero a persuadere che i cadaveri de' morti, non fossero i morti stessi, nè il solo nè il più che di loro avanzava; oltre, dico, di questo, insegnarono che l'anime degl'insepolti erano in istato di pena, non potendo niuno, mentre i loro corpi non fossero coperti di terra, passare al luogo destinatogli nell'altro mondo. Così vennero a fare che il seppellire ~~o~~i morti o le loro ceneri, e levarsegli dinanzi, fosse, com'era utile e necessario ai vivi, così stimato utile e dovuto ai morti, e desiderato da loro […] Chi riguarda come legge naturale il seppellire o abbruciare ec. i cadaveri, troverà forse in queste osservazioni di che mutar sentenza (*Zib.* 3430-32, 15 September 1823).

This passage is directly connected with the reflection of pages 3435-40, that Leopardi starts drafting on the very same day. The problem of burying the dead reverberates in the theme of ancient monuments, as opposed to modern ephemerality. Instead of merely

[173] On the topics of ruins and funeral monuments in Leopardi see Fedi, *Mausolei di sabbia*, pp. 15-117. In the forbidden section of Leopardi's library there was a copy of Volney's *Les Ruines ou Meditation sur les révolutions des empires* (1791): it seems however that Leopardi referred only later to such a work, since the only references to Volney in the *Zibaldone* date to April 1825 and are taken from a different edition than the one kept in Recanati.

recovering the *ubi sunt* topos, Leopardi delineates a perception of ancient ruins as many testimonies of the history of human illusions:

L'immaginazione e le grandi illusioni onde gli antichi erano governati, e l'amor della gloria che in lor bolliva, li facea sempre mirare alla posterità ed all'eternità, e ~~mirare~~ cercare in ogni loro opera la perpetuità, e proccurar sempre l'immortalità loro e delle opere loro. Volendo onorare un defonto innalzavano un monumento che contrastasse coi secoli, e che ancor dura forse, dopo migliaia d'anni. Noi spendiamo sovente nelle stesse occasioni quasi altrettanto in un apparato funebre, che dopo il dì dell'esequie si disfa, e non ne resta vestigio. […] Le grandi illusioni onde gli antichi erano animati non permettevano loro di contentarsi di un effetto piccolo e passeggero, di proccurare un effetto che avesse a durar poco, instabile, breve; di soddisfarsi d'una idea ristretta a poco più che a quello ch'essi vedevano. L'immaginazione spinge sempre verso quello che non cade sotto i sensi. Quindi verso il futuro e la posterità, perocchè il presente è limitato e non può contentarla; è misero ed arido, ed ella si pasce di speranza, e vive promettendo sempre a se stessa. Ma il futuro per una immaginazione gagliardissima non debbe aver limiti; altrimenti non la ~~d~~soddisfa. Dunque ella guarda e tira verso l'eternità (*Zib.* 3435-37)

The topography itself of Rome can be from this angle interpreted as a 'sentimental landscape', which visibly embodies the image of Leopardi's philosophy of history as a progressive 'degeneration':

Chi può paragonare la solidità di quest~~a~~e con quella degli edifizi pubblici o privati del 500, in Italia massimamente. In Roma, dove v'ha ~~o~~g monumenti d'ogni età dalle egiziane alla presente, si può in questi considerare la sommità, la decadenza, il distruggimento dell'umana immaginazione e illusioni; anzi pur le diverse sommità e decadenze ec. delle medesime; e le diverse età dell'immaginazione ec. e la storia delle nazioni non solo, ma in genere dello spirito umano spiritualmente considerato, malgrado la materialità degli oggetti. Si può cominciare dall'obelisco di piazza del popolo, e finire, tornando poco distante da quello, nel palazzo Lucernari che ancor si fabbrica. (*Zib.* 3438-39).

In the notes of January 1821, the connection of mourning practices and 'illusion' with the genre of *commentaria* was only suggested by a chronological and spatial continuity between fragments. In September 1823 the association is instead made explicit through a logical argumentation that broadens the perspective from monuments to literary works:

Si possono applicare queste considerazioni anche alla letteratura. Non s'usavano anticamente le brochures, nè gli opuscoli e foglietti volanti, nè scritture destinate a morire il dì dopo nate. E quello ancora che si scriveva per sola circostanza e per servire al momento, scrivevasi in modo ch'e' potesse e dovesse durare immoralmente. (*Zib.* 3439)

If ancient 'illusions' find their visible emblems in awesome monuments and in literary works conceived, with an architectural metaphor, as 'monumentum aere perennius' (Horace), modernity must needs be characterised by an equal impermanence both in architecture and in writing:

Cicerone dopo dato un consiglio al senato o al popolo, da mettersi in opera anche il dì medesimo, dopo perorata e conchiusa una causa, ancor di una piccola eredità si poneva a tavolino, e dagl'informi commẽttari che gli avevano servito a recitare, cavava, componeva, limava, perfezionava un'orazione formata sulle regole e i modelli eterni dell'arte più squisita, e come tale, consegnavala all'eternità. Così gli oratori attici, così Demostene di cui s'ha e si legge dopo 2000 anni un'orazione per una causa di 3 pecore: mentre le orazioni fatte oggi a' parlamenti o ~~n~~da niuno si leggono, o si dimenticano di là a due dì, e ne son degne, nè chi le disse, pretese nè bramò nè curò ch'elle avessero maggior durata (*Zib.* 3440).

Leopardi's attention to the 'durata' ('di là a due dì') suggests the presence of the 'hidden constellation' of the second printing revolution as the central shock in Leopardi's experience of modernity. In parallel, the 'informi commentari', as opposed to the classical ideal of a polished speech, clearly belong to the vocabulary of the 'ars excerpendi', delineating a binary op position – frailty/eternity, fragmentariness/structure, shapelessness/completeness – that implicitly situates modernity in the dimension of *commentaria*, of the 'formless commentaries' deprived of every outcome. It is arguable that these lines conceal a self-reflection on the genre itself of the *Zibaldone,* given the substantial interchangeability, in the tradition of the 'ars excerpendi', of such definitions as *commentaria* and 'zibaldoni'. The passage poses therefore the problem – challenged three years later, and from another

perspective, through the work for the prose chrestomathy – of how to apply 'antique' techniques of reading, excerpting and writing to the new and mutated context of the age of popular press. The answer is negative but the act itself of writing the *Zibaldone* testifies nonetheless a different (and maybe unconscious) attempt, or – at least – the more or less willing acceptance of the challenge.

The constant combination of Leopardi's reflections on *commentaria* and those on mourning practices of the ancients is not, as I said, accidental. In both cases, the underlying concepts are the thought of eternity and the simulacra that allow the preservation of memory, given the fracture that has separated antiquity from the age of 'ephemeral' books. In the note of April 1827 in which modern books are compared to the 'insetti chiamati efimeri' (*Zib.* 4270, 2 April), Leopardi admits that his 'discorso' has been 'non troppo lieto, e piuttosto malinconico che altrimenti' (4271). Thinking about the fate of culture is, for Leopardi, mostly 'melancholic'. This melancholy is evidently grounded in the absence of any eternity, largely the loss of that metaphysical perspective that only allows one to think of culture in terms of posterity. Leopardi's statement is an a-theological acknowledgment of the impossibility to orientate writing in a teleological perspective, which rather turns to the dimension of the 'instant' as the only fragmentary portion of time that poetry can capture and hold. By rejecting both the time characterised by 'a direction and a purpose'[174] of Christian tradition and its modern secularisation, through which time is 'albeit sundered from any notion of end and emptied of any other meaning but that of a structured process in terms of before and after',[175] Leopardi operates a clear rupture, making of the weakness of modernity the only resource left to moderns. From the point of view of considering history in terms of fracture, Leopardi, always following Agamben, comes rather closer to the Aristotelian *tò nyn*:

[174] Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 94.
[175] Ibid., p. 96.

The instant in itself is nothing more than the continuity of time [*synécheia chrónou*], a pure limit which both joins and divides past and future. As such, it is always elusive, and Aristotle expresses its paradoxically nullified character in the statement that in dividing time infinitely, the now is always 'other'; yet in uniting past and future and ensuring continuity, it is always the same; and in this is the basis of the radical 'otherness' of time, and of its 'destructive' character […].[176]

However, as Leopardi clearly understood, the only dimension of such conception of time is one's own subjectivity. If the Aristotelian *nyn* did allow 'no real experience of historicity',[177] Leopardi's acknowledgment is rather that the instant is endlessly already gone, fugitive as the nymphs Silvia and Nerina, and that an irremediable fracture analogously divides the 'ancients' from 'moderns' as well as every individual from their own infancy, from their own past, from an infinite yesterday. Borrowing a grammatical definition, Leopardi's time is neither an impossible present ('tutto passa', *La sera del dì di festa*, l. 29) nor a past simple. The Leopardian time is an imperfect, 'un tempo anteriore al presente in cui parliamo, ma [che] non ci dice esattamente quando e quanto a lungo, 'il tempo che ci deve far perdere i confini del tempo',[178] and thereby revealing itself to be the most suitable place to that 'vague and infinite'. In the late 1820s, for Leopardi, the only way to think of the book is a burial were ghosts of autobiographical memory are crystallised in the 'ricordanza', a point of tension between sweetness and atrocity, between past and present: a past-not-past, and therefore un-dead and un-*heimlich* in haunting the present via its very presence-absence, as of someone who is 'passato, finito, che non è, non sarà più, fait' (*Zib*. 4492, 21 April 1829) but who could still be there.

[176] Ibid., p. 93
[177] Ibid.
[178] Umberto Eco, 'Rilettura di Sylvie', in Gérard de Nerval, *Sylvie*, ed. and transl. by Umberto Eco (Turin: Einaudi, 1999), pp. 91-165, p. 126.

The extremely famous passage of 15 April 1828 that I quoted in the introduction is from this perspective eloquent. It is not accidental, I think, that between the lines Leopardi seem to go somehow and symptomatically back to the definition that Cancellieri had given of the 'diari'-'zibaldoni':

> Uno de' maggiori frutti che io mi propongo e spero da' miei versi, è che essi riscaldino la mia *vecchiezza* col calore della mia *gioventù*; è di assaporarli in quella età, e provar *qualche reliquia* d~~i~~e' miei sentimen~~o~~i passati, messa quivi entro, per *conservarla* e *darle durata*, *quasi in deposito*; è di *commuover me stesso* in rileggerli, come spesso mi accade, e meglio che in leggere poesie d'altri: (*Zib.* 4302, 15 April 1828, emphasis mine)

> […] viene così a formarsi a poco a poco la nostra *Vita*, e un *Diario* di tutto ciò, che accade di più interessante a' nostri giorni. Se Dio ci fa la grazia di prolungarli, qual compiacenza di riandare nella nostra *Vecchiaja* le memorie della nostra *Gioventù*, di cui, senza quest'ajuto, appena ci rimarrebbe una languida, e confusa idea![179]

The mnemotechnical function is at this stage transferred to poetry, as the rhetorical embroidery through which long dead feelings and experiences can be preserved. The reminiscence of Cancellieri shows the ultimate metamorphosis of the a-systematic 'magazeno' of the 'ars excerpendi' in the 'deposito' of the *Canti*, as a private memory crystallised in the architecture of the book. The note of April 1828 can hence be viewed as the end of the parabola leading from the idea of a 'zibaldone' to the eventual acknowledgment of the density of poetry as the ultimate venue for the charming haunting of memory.

[179] Cancellieri, *Dissertazione*, p. 111.

SECOND SECTION

STRATEGIES OF EMBODIMENT

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

If we try analysing the presence of quotations in the *Zibaldone* from a strictly formal angle, we immediately witness the absence of any unitary format in terms of orthography, handwriting and typographic conventions. This phenomenon reflects the double nature of the text that we have highlighted in the first section. On the one hand, the constant dialogue with other texts and the potential necessity of retracing bibliographical references in the future obliges Leopardi's writing to tend towards the conventions of edited texts, thus incorporating as much information as possible. On the other, the private nature of the manuscript escapes the boundaries of fixed editorial conventions. Quotations are presented in several ways and adopt different strategies, in accordance with the specific purposes of single fragments.

Leopardi employs several devices in order to signal the beginning of a quotation, such as colons or expressions sanctioned by bibliographical conventions as 'v[edi]' or 'dice' (a derivation from the classical and humanistic expression 'ut ait'). Quotation marks are scarcely employed. The only exception occurs in cases in which we have a quotation within a quotation, as is visible on *Zib*. 653-54, where Leopardi quotes a passage from Madame de Lambert: in this case, an infra-quotation from an anonymous 'philosopher' is inserted, and precisely signalled by lower-case quotation marks.[180] In some cases, the source is indicated between brackets. We can see two examples of this structure:

[180] 'Plus il y a de monde, (cioè, più gente ci sta d'intorno, più ci troviamo in mezzo al mondo attualmente) et plus les passions acquièrent d'autorité. Ib. p. 81. Un philosophe assuroit: „…qu'e plus il avoit vu de monde, plus les passions acquéroient d'autorité…„ Mme Lambert, Lettre à madeaame de ***. ou Lettre XV. dans ses oeuvres complètes citées ci-dessus, p. ~~24~~ 395' (*Zib.* 653-54, 13 February 1821).

Dice il Casa (Galateo c. 3.) che non è dicevol costume, quando ad alcuno vien veduto per via, come occorre alle volte, cosa stomachevole, il rivolgersi a' compagni, e mostrarla loro. E molto meno il porgere altrui a fiutare ~~cosa stomachevole~~ alcuna cosa puzzolente, come alcuni soglion fare, con grandissima istanza pure accostandocela al naso, e dicendo: Deh sentite di grazia, come questo pute. (*Zib.* 230, 4 September 1820)

C'est que cela me donnera un battement de cœur, répondit elle naïvement; et je suis si heureuse quand le cœur me bat! dice Lady Morgan (France. l. 3. 1818. t. 1. p. 218.) di una Dama francese e civetta. (*Zib.* 231-32, 6 September 1820)

In this last case, the quotation is underlined. Single or double underlining is often employed in the *Zibaldone*, but not necessarily and not always with quotations. This is evident, for instance, in a series of quotations from Florus in *Zib.* 32, where only some portions of the cited text are underlined.[181] Underlining is, in any case, used throughout the text for several purposes, although – quite interestingly – only in rare case for titles of works.[182] It is often used for indicating foreign words, although not always, and never with Greek: in *Zib.* 12, for example, Leopardi underlines the word 'nosé', meant to be the transcription of how the French word *nausée* is pronounced in the original language.[183]

[181] 'Per es. dice nel libro 1. Capo 3. dopo il mezzo: interdum valetudinis causa recte fieri, experimentis credo; cum eo tamen ne quis qui valere et senescere volet, hoc quotidianum habeat. (Con questo però che ec. cioè, purchè, ~~frase pr~~ locuzione pretta italiana.) E nel Lib. 2. c. 8. circa il fine: Quos lienis male habet, si tormina prehenderunt, deinde versa sunt vel in aquam inter cutem, vel in intestinorum lęvitatem, vix ulla medicina periculo subtrahit. Si trova però frase simile cioè prehendo in signif. di cogliere, ma presso i Comici latini. E parimente l. 2. c. 11. nel fine: huc potius confugiendum est, cum eo tamen ut sciamus, hic ut ~~lev~~ nullum periculum, ita levius auxilium esse. E c. 17. ~~avan~~ alquanto sopra il mezzo: recte medicina ista tentatur, cum eo tamen ne pręcordia dura s~~u~~int, ~~x~~neve etc. e lib. 3. C. 5. sul fine: scire licet...satius esse consistente jam incremento febris aliquid offerre, quam increscente, ~~cum~~ ..., cum eo tamen ut nullo tempore is qui deficit non sit sustinendus. Così c. 22. mezzo e c. 24. fine. e l. 4. c. 6. E c. 6. dopo il mezzo: In vicem ejus dari potest vel intrita ex aqua ec. (in vece di questa.) […].'

[182] An exception can be found on p. 237: 'rare, dice La Harpe di La Fontaine (Éloge de La Fontaine), qui' (10 September 1820).

[183] 'Per esempio nausea in lat. e in ital. con quell'au e con quell'ea ~~esprime~~ imita a maraviglia quel gesto che l'uomo fa e quella voce che manda scontorcendo la bocca e il naso quando è stomacato. Ma nosé non imita ~~e~~niente, ed è come quelle cose che spogliate degli spiriti e dei sali, umori, grasso ec. restano tanti cap~~i~~om~~m~~orti'.

Generally, underlining is employed in order to highlight specific concepts, as is evident by considering *Zib.* 247-48:

Quando il Petrarca poteva dire degli antipodi, e che ’l dì nostro vola ~~a~~A gente che di là forse l’aspetta, quel forse bastava per lasciarci concepir quella gente e quei paesi come cosa i~~r~~mmensa, e dilettosiss. all'immaginaz. Trovati che si sono, certamente non sono impiccoliti, nè quei paesi son piccola cosa, ma appena gli antipodi si son veduti sul mappamondo, è sparita ogni grandezza ~~e~~ ogni bellezza ogni prestigio dell’idea che se ne aveva. Perciò la matematica la quale misura quando il piacer nostro non vuol misura, definisce e circoscrive quando il piacer nostro non vuol confini (sieno pure vastissimi, anzi sia pur vinta l’immaginaz. dalla verità), analizza, quando il piacer nostro non vuole analisi nè cognizione intima ed esatta della cosa piacevole (quando anche questa cognizione non riveli nessun difetto nella cosa, anzi ce la faccia ~~cono~~ giudicare più perfetta di quello che credeva~~no~~mo, come accade nell’esame delle opere di genio, che scoprendo tutte le bellezze, le fa sparire), la matematica, dico, dev’esser necessariamente l’opposto del piacere. (*Zib.* 247-48, 17 September 1820)

Here, underlining shows a threefold function. Firstly, it is used to signal the quotation from Petrarch (*RVF* L, l. 2-3) as a specific object of Leopardi’s analysis: the distinction between the two lines is marked by the capital ‘A’, corrected by Leopardi while writing. Secondly, the single adverb ‘forse’, which is for Leopardi the semantic unit that gives the sentence its peculiar flavour, has a double underline, which is employed in order to mark its distinction from the context, and a single one in the following sentence since it is the object on which Leopardi’s attention is focused. Thirdly the two sentences underlined in the rest of the passage share a common feature, since they are both concessive ones and are meant to introduce extreme examples that nevertheless confirm Leopardi’s hypothesis. We can hence argue that Petrarch’s lines are not underlined insofar as they form a quotation, but as far as they have the semantic unity of a maxim. This conjecture can be confirmed by a passage to be found in *Zib.* 302-03:

Une résistance inutile (aux malheurs) retarde l'habitude qu'elle (l'ame) contracteroit avec son état. Il faut céder aux malheurs. Renvoyez-les à la patience: c'est à elle seule à les adoucir. La même, ibid. p. 88. […]
Bione Boristenite *erōtētheís pote tís mâllon agōniâ* (anxietate maiore detineatur), *éphē, ho tà méghista boulómenos euēmereî*n colui che ~~che~~ cerca le supreme felicità. Laerz. in Bione, l. 4. segm. 48.) (*Zib.* 302-03, 5-6 November 1820)

Here, the first quotation (from Madame de Lambert's *Avis d'une mere à son fils*: the allusion 'la même' is to the preceding passage) is not signalled as such in any way, although it is integrated and corrected by a parenthesis that specifyies the context of the sentence. The second citation, from Diogenes Laërtius, is equally not cited, although partially translated, first into Latin and then into Italian. This last translation is underlined, as if it provided an expression characterised by a semantic and formular unity. This custom of underlining specific maxims, *sententiæ* or specific formulas is widely present throughout the text, for instance in *Zib.* 309: 'Di uno sciocco che sempre vien fuori colla logica, dove ha gran presunzione, e la caccia in tutti i discorsi. Egli è propriamente l'uomo definito alla greca; un animale logico' (9 November 1820). Here, the double underline shows where the emphasis should fall in reciting the joke, as well as the ironic core of the joke itself, grounded in the double meaning of the word 'animale'. The underline is therefore also used to signal specific cases in which the writing of the *Zibaldone* turns into an aphoristic style, either of Leopardi's himself or through the excerption of specific passages from other authors, isolated as *sententiæ*.[184] This last practice is a feature of humanistic writing, in which – according to

[184] 'L'aforisma sembra la forma più adatta per rendere gli aneddoti dal contenuto paradossale o morale. Possiamo trovare centinaia di aforismi nel testo, considerando quelli che identifichiamo immediatamente, perché nascono direttamente come tali, e quelli nascosti nei lunghi ragionamenti', Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone'*, p. 69.

Compagnon – we witness the secularisation of medieval *auctoritas*, expressed through aphoristic maxims, into a textual dimension made of quotations.[185]

A specific case is that of quotations from poetry. In some cases, while quoting passages from poems, Leopardi begins a new paragraph, and copies poetic lines dividing the one from the other. See for example *Zib*. 509:

Il Petrarca nella Canzone Italia mia.
Ed è questo del seme,
Per più ~~rossor,~~ dolor, del popol senza legge
Al qual, come si legge,
Mario aperse sì 'l fianco,
Che memoria ~~del fatto~~ de l'opra anco non langue,
Quando assetato e stanco,
Non più bevve del fiume acqua che sangue.
Non è stato ~~so se abbiano~~ osservato, ch'io sappia, che quest'ultima iperbole è levata di peso da Floro III. 3. nel~~la~~ racconto che fa di quella medesima battaglia contro i Teutoni, della quale il Petrarca. Ut victor Romanus de cruento flumine non plus aquę biberit, quam sanguinis Barbarorum. Giacchè l'armata Romana era assetata, e combattè quasi per l'acqua. (15 January 1821)

Here, the manuscript is extremely telling. Leopardi is plausibly quoting Petrarch by heart, as it is evident by the two mistakes (quite interesting by themselves, since only the second one can be considered as a *lectio facilior*), corrected at a second stage by superimposing the right expression over the deleted one. The quotation shows up in the page, through a terse

[185] Within early modernity, writes Compagnon, 'L'adage, non plus assertion péremptoire et rédemptoire, non plus vérité révélée ou émission d'une voix divine, est rapporté à des occurrences particulières et séculières. C'est le retour au texte, et à la diversité des textes, qui relativiste l'*auctoritas*. Alors que l'allégorie ou le signe biblique consacrait les *auctoritates* comme absolus de sens, les citations désacralisent l'adage en le ramenant à des origines circonstancielles. Ce qui fait l'adage, ce qui lui donne titre à figurer dans la collection, c'est l'ensemble des citations qui l'étayent, sans que l'un des deux éléments, adage ou citation, détienne une quelconque transcendance. L'adage entretient avec la citation la même relation que l'emblème avec la devise (*figura* et *dictum*); il est un signe caractérisé par la convenance artifici elle et conditionelle de l'objet à l'idée' (*La seconde main*, pp. 268-69). We can also add that, in the long passage of *Zib.* 393 ss., in which Leopardi confronts his own 'sistema' with Christian doctrine, passages from the Bible are underlined, as to prop up the reflection with morsels of the Holy Scripture.

calligraphy and through a marked spacing between lines. The comment, in which Petrarch's line 'Non più bevve del fiume acqua che sangue' is shown as a literal translation of a passage from Florus's, has the Latin sentence underlined. In parallel, Leopardi's corrections within the comment ('Non è stato osservato' instead of 'Non so se abbiano osservato') tend towards a more detached and depersonalised style. In other words, Leopardi is here adopting the style of critical editions, and the connection between Petrarch's and Florus's texts is rendered through the structure of a main corpus/footnote relationship. The calligraphic disposition of the page is shaped in accordance with this typographical model, which explains why Petrarch's title and Florus's sentence are both underlined.

In other cases, passages from poetry are instead quoted within the normal text, and signalled only by the capital letter at the beginning of each line. This strategy can be seen, for instance, in *Zib*. 24, where Leopardi is speaking about Vincenzo da Filicaja:

Fu ardito caldo veemente ~~nelle cose~~ urtantesi nelle cose, ardito nelle voci (come instellarsi inarenare) nelle locuzioni nelle costruzioni, nel trarre ~~le forme~~ dal greco e latino le forme così de' sentimenti, (come Canz. 70. Eroica: Meco non vo' che vaglia sì sconsigliata voce, e altrove: A me non scenda in cor sì ria parola: e nota ch'io dico le forme de' sentimenti e non i sentimenti) come delle parole, nel che alle volte fu felice, come: Canz. Eroica 23: Qual non fe' scempio sanguinoso acerbo L'aspro cor dell'Eacide superbo? Canz. Eroica 71: Sol fe' contrasto il gran sangue di Guisa ec. Imitò anche bene i greci e Pindaro e Orazio nell'economia del componimento.

This example shows a different strategy in quoting, which indicates a different purpose and the underlying presence of another model. While the quotation from Petrarch's *All'Italia* formed part of a philological analysis, and the disposition of the page was therefore modelled in accordance with the style of philological commentaries, in this case the analysis corresponds instead to an aesthetical and stylistic model. Leopardi is analysing here the effects engendered by Filicaja's poetry, stressing specific lexical choices. As we will see, the

model is here that of ancient literary treatises, and more specifically that of the pseudo-Longinus's treatise on *The Sublime*, in which quotations from single or double lines of poetry are precisely interpolated within the text.

In this section this hypothesis will be verified, namely if a formal analysis of quotations can be taken as an evidence of the underlying stylistic models and of the implicit destinations of specific passages of the *Zibaldone*. In other words, the intention is to analyse whether Leopardi's different quotation policies correspond to specific choices in terms of genre and purpose, in view of future works. Analysis will stem from a single case study (chapter 1) in order to analyse Leopardi's position as an 'intentional author' with respect to philosophy of history and political theory (chapter 2) and aesthetics (chapter 3).

CHAPTER 1

A CASE STUDY: MONTESQUIEU IN THE *ZIBALDONE*

As Antoine Compagnon formalises, every quotation, broadly intended, is grounded in two 'semiotic systems' reciprocally put into relation, the quoted (S_1) and the quoting one (S_2). Each one is, however, composed of two elements, a subject-author (A_1 and A_2) and a text (T_1 and T_2), so that the possibilities of relation are actually four: T_1-T_2, A_1-T_2, T_1-A_2, A_1-A_2.[186] This plurality of relations multiplies the shapes that a quotation may assume, as well as the purposes and the strategies to which it may be bent.

This section will discuss the possibility of analysing the inner mechanisms and strategies of the *Zibaldone* through the close inquiry into a case study. Given A_2=Leopardi and T_2=the *Zibaldone*, the way in which Leopardi's semiotic system enacts a tension with the one that we know by the name 'Montesquieu' (A_1) or Montesquieu's works as far as Leopardi approaches them (T_1), will be examined.

This choice is basically due to three reasons. First of all, Montesquieu's influence is limited to a very specific portion of the *Zibaldone*, both from a textual and chronological point of view. On the one hand, we actually witness the first reference to this author on page 51 and the last one on page 3215: considering that the one immediately preceding this was on page 1601, and that the major concentration of references is to be found in pages 114-457, it is evident that Montesquieu's presence stands behind a very limited portion of Leopardi's text, and is therefore the ideal object for a focused and scrupulous inquiry. On the other hand,

[186] Compagnon, *La seconde main*, p. 359.

these references cover an equally relatively limited period: the first reference is dated 5 June 1820 and the last one to 20-21 August 1823 (the ones on pages 51 and 80, which are not dated, have been later included, and they can be approximately dated – respectively – to 28 July and between 12 and the 24 June, following Leopardi's reading, which is quite linear). Therefore, the analysis can be circumscribed to a very specific period of Leopardi's intellectual development. It is, however, a very significant one, since it is bounded in one aspect by the first attempts to give the *Zibaldone* the structure of what has been called a 'mental journal' ('diario mentale')[187] (as we have seen, Leopardi starts dating fragments on January 1820) and by the acknowledgment of his metamorphosis into 'filosofo di professione (di poeta ch'io era)' (143-44, 1 July 1820), and, in the other aspect by Leopardi's travel to Rome, as a first experience of the outer world (November 1822-May 1823). The presence of Montesquieu appears as strictly connected with the progressive construction of the date as a 'tassello di un sistema di riferimento per l'identificazione di parti testuali': the four fragments of 9 June 1820, drafted in the course of the reading of Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence*, witness the presence of the date as the 'fine di un discorso che si sviluppa in quattro paragrafi e che ha Montesquieu come riferimento comune'.[188] Equally, the reading of Montesquieu takes place at the core of the progressive distinction between paragraphs, as a form of internal organisation of the text.[189] Montesquieu, as one of the authors found in the Recanati library and whose presence is among the strongest in the first years of the *Zibaldone*, is besides one of the first authors for

[187] Luigi Blasucci, 'Quattro modi di approccio allo "Zibaldone"', p. 231.
[188] Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone'*, pp. 63-64.
[189] Ibid.

which full bibliographical references are given,[190] and – as we will see – who provides Leopardi with some of the key topics later independently developed within the book.

Secondly, it must be considered that Leopardi reads and quotes Montesquieu from one and only one source, namely the sixth tome of the *Œuvres de Monsieur de Montesquieu* published in Amsterdam in 1781 and including the *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (pp. 1-284), the *Dialogue de Sylla et d'Eucrate* (pp. 287-300), the *Temple de Gnide* (pp. 303-61) and the *Essai sur le Goût* (pp. 365-400). Such eventuality helps certainly to circumscribe the analysis, and to follow closely how actually Leopardi deals with the *object*-book even from the point of view of the strictest materiality – namely, the progression in reading as it is shown through references and quotation, even in relation with the paratextual dimension[191] of the bibliographical source. From this perspective, the references to Montesquieu therefore share a relatively homogeneous nature.

Thirdly, it should not be forgotten that such an example allows one to see with great clarity the peculiarities and the ambiguities of the relationship that Leopardi enters into with his sources. As we will see, Leopardi's approach to Montesquieu is more or less explicitly conceptualised as an encounter with French culture, which is perceived as an alterity and, at the same time, as the most evident epitome of modern culture and its aporias. Facing Montesquieu means to face French culture and post-Enlightenment modernity as a whole, as a crucial and significant step in Leopardi's intellectual development and in his progressive self-construction as the poet-philosopher-polemist of Bourbon Restoration Italy. Quite significantly, among the works of Montesquieu, Leopardi does not engage in a close reading of the *Lettres persanes* or of the *Esprit des lois*, which were also in his father's library: he chooses two works at the same time minor and closer to his interests, such as the *Grandeur*

[190] See ibid., p. 49n.
[191] For this concept, see Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil, 1987).

and the *Essai sur le Goût*, through which the issues that he feels to be the most urgent can be more directly challenged. His approach to these two works is very personal: and it is maybe not by chance if their influence reverberates in two topics that have been somehow underestimated in Leopardi-related criticism and have only recently been rediscovered in their full potentiality, such as Leopardi's political analysis and his seminal contribution to the aesthetical debate on the 'je ne sais quoi'. On the first subject and the influence on Leopardi's reflection of Montesquieu's writing, a recent study by Chiara Fenoglio[192] is relevant; on the second subject, first attempts at analysis have been made by Antonio Prete[193] and Fabiana Cacciapuoti,[194] and later by Raffaele Gaetano.[195] It is possible that a formal study on the use of quotations from Montesquieu can shed new light on these problems, or at least on the modalities through which Leopardi attains to define a personal contribution on these subjects in the course of his reading from Montesquieu.

Therefore, this chapter is, from many points of view, a laboratory: the purpose is, first of all, to check the possibility of an analysis of Leopardi's quotation practice through an emblematic case study, in order to verify how much it can reveal about Leopardi's development of thought. On the other hand, it is an attempt to define a sketch of the methodology through which it will be possible to interpret Leopardi's interaction with other sources as shown by quotations.

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[192] Chiara Fenoglio, '"Furore di calcoli": le "Considérations" di Montesquieu e Leopardi', in *Lettere italiane* 58 (2006), pp. 476-88.
[193] Antonio Prete, 'Introduzione' to Giacomo Leopardi, *Teorica delle arti, lettere ec. Parte speculativa. Edizione tematica dello* Zibaldone di pensieri *stabilita sugli* Indici *leopardiani*, ed. by Fabiana Cacciapuoti (Rome:. Donzelli, 2000), pp. vii-xvi, pp. xi-xii.
[194] Fabiana Cacciapuoti, 'Introduzione' to Giacomo Leopardi, *Teorica delle arti, lettere ec.*, pp. lxxvi-lxxxv.
[195] Raffaele Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime* (Soveria Mannelli: Rubbettino, 2002), pp. 371-94.

From this perspective, the investigation will basically proceed through three steps, which roughly correspond to three modalities of relationship between S_1 (basically, the object 'Montesquieu, Amsterdam 1781') and S_2 (for which Leopardi's definition of 'pensieri', which implies both A_2 and T_2 can be proposed). The point of departure is Charles Sanders Peirce's distinction of the three categories of signs according to their 'ground' (their nature in itself from a cognitive point of view) and to the relation to their object (A: 'the sign in itself'; B: 'the sign as related to its object'; C: 'the sign as interpreted to represent an object'), as used by Compagnon to classify different types of quotation. Following Peirce, Compagnon proposes the following schema of semiotic relationships:

	A	**B**	**C**
1	Qualisign	Icon	Rheme
2	Sinsign	Index	Proposition
3	Legisign	Symbol	Argument

Now, if just the second column is considered (concerning the relationship entertained by the sign with its object) we witness, according to Compagnon, these three possibilities:

- icône: s[i le signe] possède en lui quelque caractère de l'objet, auquel cas il exhibe cet objet;
- indice: s'il est dans une relation existentielle avec l'objet, auquel cas il le désigne;
- symbole: s'il est en relation avec l'intérpretant selon une loi impliquant que ce signe soit interprété comme référant à l'objet, auquel cas il le signifie.[196]

Adapting these categories to a relationship between S_1/S_2, it will be possible to get a first repartition of three different modalities of textual (re)appropriation:

[196] Compagnon, *La seconde main*, pp. 62-63.

1. what is commonly known as a veritable *quotation*: we have here an 'iconic' relationship, since S_2 literally shows and exhibits the parent text in full 'faithfulness';
2. the so-called *paraphrase*: S_2 *designates* the parent text, without explicitly reproducing it; quoting Frege's *Über Sinn und Bedeutung* (1892), it may be said that what is incorporated within the intertextual relationship is here the *Bedeutung* rather than the *Sinn*, and S_1 is therefore mediated by S_2's interpretation;
3. *reference* (also known as *footnote*, or at least a potential one): in this case, we speak of a *symbolic* relationship, since the indication of source and page number stands as a *sign* to something else, namely a passage which is not incorporated but only evoked.[197]

This analysis will follow this tri-partition, but reversed: therefore, firstly analysed will be Leopardi's references, either from a formal point of view (namely the way through which the parent-text is evoked) and by inquiring about the ways they are inserted within the text. Such procedure allows one to follow Leopardi's reading practice, and gives many hints on the way he relates to the text, as well as to the purposes of his reading: it also allows one to follow the manifold function of references in Leopardi's work, permitting an attempt at a first subdivision of their nature and to clarify the ambiguous notion of the 'implicit reader' of the *Zibaldone*. Secondly, analysis will turn to Leopardi's paraphrases and eventually his quotations, in an attempt to show either how they are detached from the parent-text or the way they intersect Leopardi's own writing, even deforming and influencing his style. In this

[197] I make a very free use of Compagnon's categories, allowing myself to modify and to adapt them in the course of my analysis.

case, also dealt with will be the way Leopardi builds up his own argumentations through a texture of references, not only from Montesquieu but also from other authors.

It is evident how philosophical and literary analysis (roughly, an analysis of *content*) is – at this stage – intentionally left behind. The purpose is precisely the opposite: how a strictly formal analysis can give hints as to how Leopardi relates with his sources and eventually attains the construction of his own thought. The very central problems Leopardi deals with in these pages of the *Zibaldone* – connecting his reflections with two main topics of late eighteenth to early-nineteenth century politics and aesthetics, namely the decadence of empires and 'je ne sais quoi' – should be left floating in the course of the analysis, to which it implicitly and constantly refers.

1.a. Reference (T_1-T_2)

As we have said, the relation implied by the reference is a *symbolic* one: the parent text is evoked but not shown nor incorporated in any way, and the reference is therefore a trace, a sign that points to another textual venue. In modern (not only) academic writing, the reference has assumed the form of the footnote:[198] a practice to which Leopardi himself had been accustomed since the writings of his youth, from the *Storia della astronomia* to the *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi*. References in the *Zibaldone*, as it is notably shown by the following examples, belong to the same category: the peculiar, projectual dimension of the 'scartafaccio' makes of them – more than footnotes – *potential* footnotes, fragments situated between the 'reading note' and the apparatus of a work to come.

[198] Concerning the footnote and its history cf. Antony Grafton, *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1999).

The references to the 'Grandeur' and the project of a political work

Leopardi reads the *Grandeur* approximately from the beginning of June 1820 to the 12th of the same month (*Zib*. 113-124). In these days, there are fourteen references in total to Montesquieu: the progression in reading can be precisely followed through the presence of references, and can be schematised as shown in FIG. I. It has to be remarked that, in these days, the reading seems to engage Leopardi completely: among the twenty-five thoughts composing these eleven pages, thirteen are explicitly reconnected to the *Grandeur*, and many of the others – as we will see later – can be reconnected to reflections originated by Montesquieu's work.

We now witness a peculiar characteristic of Leopardi's references to Montesquieu: their extreme accuracy. A schematic overview will be helpful: further references will be made following this working numeration.

1. Montesquieu (Grandeur ec. c. 4. Amsterdam 1781. p. 31. fine) (**113**);
2. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 6. p. 68 (**114**);
3. Montesquieu l. c. p. 115. lin. ult. e 116. lin. 1. e 5. chapit. 11 (**114**);
4. Montesquieu, l. c. ch. 11. p. 124. fine (**116**);
5. Montesquieu, l. c. ch. 13. p. 138. e nella nota (**117**);
6. Montesquieu […] (l. c. ch. 13. p. 139. fine) (**117**);
7. Montesquieu Grandeur ec. ch. 5. p. 48. e la nota (**119**);
8. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 13. fine. (**120**);
9. Montesquieu ch. 14. p. 155 (**120**);

10. Montesquieu loc. cit. ch. 14. p. 157 (**121**);

11. Montesquieu ch. 14. fine (**121**);

12. Montesquieu […] (ch. 15. p. 160.) (**122**);

13. Montesquieu Grandeur ec. ch. 2. p. 20. fine e ch. 16. p. 179. e la nota b[199] (**123**);

14. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 16. p. 176 (**124**).

We see at first that the author is always indicated, with his full name ('Montesquieu'); the title usually is, either in the form 'Grandeur ec' (1, 7, 13) or in that 'l.c.' (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 14), and – in one case – with the full form 'loc. cit.' (10). Leopardi always includes a reference to the original chapter (usually in the French form 'ch.'/'chapit., except in 1., where he uses the Italian one 'c.') and to page number; sometimes he addresses a specific point in the page (1: 'p.31. fine'; 3: 'p.115. lin. ult. e 116. lin.1. e 5.'; 6: 'p.139. fine'; 8: 'p.709. capoverso 1'; 13: 'p.20. fine"), and, in three cases, to a footnote (5, 7 and 13). In only one case (11) does Leopardi makes reference to the end of a chapter ('ch.14. fine'), without indicating the page number, which probably means that, while writing the passage, he is not directly checking the text.

Such accuracy probably hides a specific intention. If we actually look at the 'disegni letterari' of the years 1820-21, we find the project for a political work, in which Montesquieu is explicitly mentioned:

Necessità di render la virtù cosa amabile non per ragione ma per passione, e utile.
Della falsa aspettativa di alcuni intorno ai libri di Cic[erone] della repubblica.
Dello scopo degli antichi (il bello e non l'utile né il vero).
Della diversa disposizione degli antichi e de' moderni rispetto alla necessità.

[199] All editors here misread the manuscript, and write 'nota 6', while in Montesquieu's book footnotes are numbered with small capital letters (in the *Zibaldone* manuscript, Leopardi's 'b' is very close to a '6').

Di quella famosa esclamazione di Bruto vicino a morte.
Delle cagioni de' fatti eroici (V. Montesq[uieu] P. 215, 1. 4).
Di un effetto particolare del Cristianesimo.
Oggetto e conclus[ione]. Di questo libro. Nostro ritorno alle illus[ioni]. E pur la politica tresta sempre nello stesso grado di calcolo meccanico. Applicazione della cogniz[ione] dell'uomo e della nat[ura] in grande alla politica, ancora da farsi.
Del bello e dell'utile.
Della barbarie.
Dell'amore della virtù presso gli antichi, v. il principio della p[agina] dietro.
Necessità di ravvivare lo spirito nazionale se i principi vogliono aggrandire i loro stati.
Necessità di rendere individuale l'interesse per lo stato, il quale è stato cagione della grandezza degli antichi popoli. Montesquieu lo dice tutto giorno dei Romani.[200]

Similar topics are present in the preceding 'disegni',[201] so to suggest that – at this chronological stage – Leopardi is reflecting upon the possibility of a civil action of literature, to be led through works 'nazional[i] e del tempo',[202] which however must almost always be conceived under the inspiration of Greek or Latin classics. The conjecture of connecting the reading of the *Grandeur* with this project is confirmed also by other fragments, as those of *Zib.* 113-124: on pages 114 and 115 (7 June), as well as 118 (9 June) there are reflections on the 'barbarie'; other fragments (like the ones of *Zib.* 115-16, 7-8 June) might be connected to the 'diversa disposizione degli antichi e de' moderni rispetto alla necessità'.[203] Such

[200] *TPP*, pp. 1110-11.
[201] The literary draft n. III (*TPP*, pp. 1108-10) includes six literary projects, more specifically referring to: 1. a literary biography, in the style of Tacitus, of the Polish general Tadeus Kosciuzko, in which the independence of Poland should have been compared to the inertia of the Italians ('augurare all'Italia che si possa dire una volta lo stesso di lei', po' 1108); 2. a historical novel, for which is curiously taken as a paragon Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, 'contenente la storia di qualche nazione prima grande poi depressa, poi tornata in grande stato per mezzi che si dovrebbero fingere simili a quelli per li quail si può sperare o desiderare che l'Italia recuperi il suo buon essere'; 3. satiric dialogues, inspired by Lucian, which 'supplirebbero in certo modo a tutto ciò che manca nella Comica italiana', attempting to 'dare all'Italia un saggio del suo vero linguaggio comico, che tuttavia bisogna assolutamente creare'; 4. an essay on the present condition of Italian literature, 'opera magistrale nazionale e riformatrice'; 5. a didascalic poem about forests; 6. biographies of the 'più eccellenti Capitani e cittadini italiani', inspired by Cornelius Nepos and Plutarch.
[202] *TPP*, p. 1108.
[203] See also p. 164 (11 July), where the 'barbarie de' secoli di mezzo' is compared to the 'Persiani divenuti fiacchissimi […] per la depravazione degli antichi costumi'", with a

coincidences might suggest that the project could be precisely dated to June 1820: nevertheless, it is evident that the reading of Montesquieu takes place in the context of a reflection on Italian literature and national identity. As far as our purposes are concerned, since the reading is already inserted within the frame of a projected work, the accuracy in references might then be motivated by the exigency of retracing passages to be quoted in the writing to come.

References to Montesquieu show a multi-faceted nature, and concern several topics: it is possible, however, to individuate some common structures, which may allow one to delineate specific sub-typologies of reference. This is particularly evident if we analyse them in their rhetorical-argumentative dimension:

1. La cagione di quello che dice Montesquieu (Grandeur ec. c. 4. Amsterdam 1781. p. 31. fine) […];
2. […] e così l'opposto, nè ci ebbe mai tanto ostinati e infocati partigiani del papa come a tempo dei Ghibellini. V. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 6. p. 68;
3. Vedete gli affari di Clodio, e Montesquieu l. c. p. 115. lin. ult. e 116. lin. 1. e 5. chapit. 11 […];
4. La cagione di quello che dice Montesquieu, l. c. ch. 11. p. 124. fine […];
5. In quello che dice Montesquieu, l. c. ch. 13. p. 138. e nella nota, osservate […] La cagione è che […];
6. In proposito di quello che dice Montesquieu della codardia fortunata e propizia di Ottaviano (l. c. ch. 13. p. 139. fine) considerate […] (117-18, 9th June 1820);

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reference to the *Cyropaedia*: the same structure of the projected historical novel drafted in the ‘disegni letterari’.

7. […] non avendo conosciuto i romani se non tardissimo, (v. Montesquieu Grandeur ec. ch. 5. p. 48. e la nota) […];
8. Dal che si può vedere quanto sia scemata l'utilità della storia. V. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 13. fine. V. p. 709. capoverso 1;
9. La cagione principale di ciò che dice Montesquieu ch. 14. p. 155. è che […];
10. La cagion vera secondo me di quello che dice Montesquieu loc. cit. ch. 14. p. 157. di uno fatto accusare da Tiberio […];
11. Le cagioni di quello che nota Montesquieu ch. 14. fine, e se ne maraviglia, sono[…];
12. La cagione che adduce Montesquieu dell'esser sovente il principio de' cattivi regni, come il fine dei buoni, (ch. 15. p. 160.) non è buona […];
13. Al contrario quando declinarono alla barbarie. (V. Montesquieu Grandeur ec. ch. 2. p. 20. fine e ch. 16. p. 179. e la nota b.);
14. La cagione di quella contentezza di noi stessi che proviamo nel leggere le vite o le gesta dei grandi e virtuosi (v. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 16. p. 176.) è che […].

One first consideration is that at least two macro-categories can almost immediately be individuated. In one case, we actually witness a veritable footnote-like structure; the reader is addressed to a specific passage of the original work, in order to confirm an hypothesis, to check an example or to broaden the perspective from the theory expressed in Leopardi's text. No evaluation of Montesquieu's thought is basically given, and Montesquieu is generally taken as an example, as a source or as a scientific *auctoritas* (2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14). Formally, these references are usually introduced by 'V.' (= 'vedete') (2, 3, 7, 8, 13, 14) or with some other expressions (5: 'osservate'; 6: 'considerate'): in some sense, it can be therefore said that in such references the parent text and the *Zibaldone* are dialoguing,

namely, that they stand on a parallel level. Leopardi's position is autonomous, and it refers to Montesquieu's as in a footnote, to integrate what could anyhow stand on its own: it might also refer to other sources, as it happens in 3, where the reference is double – to 'gli affari di Clodio' (without mentioning of a source), and to a passage from the *Grandeur*.

The situation is completely reversed if we consider the other group of references. Here, the paradigm is the one that we could name as that of 'critique': namely, it is the case of moments when Leopardi explains what, in Montesquieu's text, remains obscure, incomplete and eventually wrong (1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14). In this case, the reference is not a mere support to Leopardi's theory, but is the veritable cause and object of Leopardi's reflection: the texts are not dialoguing, and the attitude is rather of the glossator, of the one who explains and reveals. Leopardi's aim is to clarify the veritable cause of some phenomenon; formally, these references are usually introduced by the word 'cagione', precisely 'cause', variously declinated (1, 4, 5, 12, 14: 'la cagione'; 9: 'la cagione principale'; 10: 'la cagion vera'; 11: 'le cagioni'). And even if sometimes Leopardi's position is understated (10: 'secondo me'), it usually implies an auto-appropriation which is the source of a judgement (12: 'la cagione che adduce Montesquieu […] non è buona'). Leopardi's text stands therefore as an integration and an explanation of Montesquieu's.

The separation between these two kinds of reference is clear, and even statistically compensated (eight examples for the first category, seven for the second one). Still, there are two cases of overlapping (5 and 14): these hybrid occurrences seem to be specular, since in the first one Leopardi addresses the reader to a passage and then explains 'la cagione', and in the second one explains 'la cagione' of a phenomenon and then inserts a reference. They are, however, generally separated, indicating two clearly different approaches to the parent text

that could be used as a general framework to interpret the role of reference in the *Zibaldone* in general.

Another aspect to consider is that of the point of view. When it's not abbreviated as 'v.', Leopardi introduces the references with the second plural person (3: 'vedete'; 5: 'osservate'; 6. 'considerate'). Such remark is interesting, since it may suggest that references are not meant as mere reading notes, but somehow conceived within the perspective of a public: this seems to confirm the hypothesis that the reading of the *Grandeur* takes place in the frame of a projected political work, and, even, that these passages from the *Zibaldone* are somehow already part of this work.

The references to the 'Essai' and the 'Teoria del piacere'

Between the reading of the *Grandeur* and that of the *Essai sur le Goût*, Leopardi reads also the *Dialogue de Sylla et d'Eucrate* and the *Temple de Gnide*, testified by a reference each:[204] it is the reading of the *Essai*, however, the one which engages Leopardi the most, since he seems to spend more than a month on Montesquieu's text (from 6 July to 17 August). If we actually visualise the progression of references, however, we see that Leopardi's reading follows a completely different trajectory than that through which he had approached the *Grandeur* (FIG. II).

In other words, Leopardi's references do not follow the internal progression of the book: it is evident that the reading must have been completed very quickly, and then Leopardi has

[204] 'Io non credo molto a quello che dice ~~Sil~~ Montesquieu Dialogue de Sylla et d'Eucrate, ~~massimamente~~ particolarmente p.293-295. per ispiegare il carattere e le azioni di Silla' (135, 24 June 1820); 'I migliori momenti dell'amore sono quelli di una ~~tra~~ quieta e dolce malinconia dove tu piangi e non sai di che, e quasi ti rassegni riposatamente a una sventura e non sai quale. In quel riposo la tua anima meno agitata, è quasi piena, e quasi gusta la felicità. (V. Montesquieu Temple de Gnide canto 5. dopo il mezzo. p. 342.)' (142, 27 June 1820).

frequently come back on specific passages following his own considerations. This frequency is notable, showing a peculiar interest of Leopardi's in the subject:

1. Montesquieu Essai sur le Goût. Des plaisirs de l'ame. p. 369-370 (154, 6 July);
2. Montesq. ivi. capo I. p. 366 (154, 6 July);
3. Montesquieu (Essai sur le goût, De la curiosité. p. 374.375.) (170, 12-23 July);
4. Montesquieu nel luogo citato p. *170*. qui sopra (178, 12-23July);[205]
5. Montesquieu l. c. De la sensibilité. p. 392 (178, 12-23 July);
6. Montesquieu (Essai sur le goût. Des plaisirs de la symétrie) (186, 28 July);
7. Montesquieu Essai sur le goût. Des plaisirs de la surprise. Amsterdam 1781. p. 386. Du je ne sais quoi. p. 394. progression de la surprise p. 398 (189, 28 July);
8. Montesquieu, l. c. des Contrastes p. 383 (189, 28 July);
9. Montesquieu, Essai sur le Goût. Des diverses causes qui peuvent produire un sentiment. De la sensibilité. De la délicatesse p. 389-393. (191-92, 29 July);
10. Montesquieu (Essai sur le Goût. Du je ne sais quoi) (198, 4-9 August);
11. Montesquieu, Essai sur le goût. Amsterdam 1781. du je ne sais quoi. p. 396-397 (204, 9 August);
12. Montesquieu l. più volte cit. De la délicatesse (213,17 August).

From a formal point of view, Leopardi's references to the *Essai sur le Goût* do not show radical differences compared to that from the *Grandeur*. Here too the author is always indicated, in one case with an abbreviated form (2: 'Montesq.'); the same happens with the title of the work, where complete references (1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 10,11) are curiously more than the

[205] 3 and 4 refer to the same passage of the *Essai sur le Goût*: I have however considered these as two separate references.

forms ‘ivi’ (2), ‘luogo citato’ (4), ‘l.c.’ (5, 8), ‘l. più volte cit.’ (12), which can perhaps be explained by the fact that Leopardi indulges on the *Essai* for a longer time, more than a month, and the references are diluted among many more paragraphs. Since the *Essai* is thematically divided into separate chapters, Leopardi usually puts the reference to chapter titles, either to indicate chapters in their totality (6, 10, 12) or specific passages, in which cases he addresses page numbers.

The peculiarities of Leopardi’s reading of the *Essai* are, however, better shown by an analysis of how references are inserted within the author’s own prose:

1. Da quello che dice Montesquieu Essai sur le Goût. Des plaisirs de l'ame. p. 369-370. deducete […];
2. Era un sogno di Platone […] (v. Montesq. ivi. capo 1. p. 366.) […] come dice Montesquieu […];
3. La qual cosa il Montesquieu (Essai sur le goût, De la curiosité. p. 374.375.) attribuisce alla curiosità. Male;
4. la virtù, i piaceri corporali, quelli della curiosità (v. se vuoi Montesquieu nel luogo citato p. *170*. qui sopra) […];
5. come l'idea rispettiva della bellezza dipende dalle assuefazioni costumi opinioni ec. (V. Montesquieu l. c. De la sensibilité. p. 392.);
6. La ragione che reca Montesquieu (Essai sur le goût. Des plaisirs de la symétrie) […] non mi capacita. […] Ora io domando perchè […] La ragion vera è questa. […];
7. Perchè poi il piacere inaspettato […] parte con quella che ho notata, p. 73. E v. se vuoi Montesquieu Essai sur le goût. Des plaisirs de la surprise. Amsterdam 1781. P .386. Du je ne sais quoi. p. 394. progression de la surprise p. 398;

8. […] come guardando quelle figure gotiche che dice Montesquieu, l.c. des Contrastes p. 383. […] Ragioni. […];
9. Con quello che dice Montesquieu, Essai sur le Goût. Des diverses causes qui peuvent produire un sentiment. De la sensibilité. De la délicatesse p. 389-393. spiegate la cagione per cui […] Questo e tutto l'altro che dice Montesquieu è notabilissimo, e applicabile a diversissimi casi e condizioni […];
10. Montesquieu (*Essai sur le Goût. Du je ne sais quoi*) fa consistere la grazia e il non so che, principalmente nella sorpresa […] E forse anche per questo motivo accade quello che dice Montesquieu […];
11. L'affettazione toglie il contrasto ec. ec. V. se vuoi Montesquieu, Essai sur le goût. Amsterdam 1781. du je ne sais quoi. p. 396-397;
12. […] come una maggiore irritabilità e dilicatezza del palato, […] V. se vuoi Montesquieu l. più volte cit. De la délicatesse.

We immediately notice that Leopardi's approach to the *Essai* is far more critical. The references that, concerning the *Grandeur*, we had defined as (potential) footnotes – Leopardi referring to the parent text in order to integrate it, in a sort of reciprocal dialogue – are far reduced when reading the *Essai* (2, 5): in most cases, Leopardi addresses the reader with the eloquent expression 'v. se vuoi Montesquieu' (4, 7, 11, 12), which ultimately has the same function but reduces the reference to a mere possibility, not compulsory nor relevant in order to understand Leopardi's own thought. The *Essai sur le Goût* is rather a point of departure: like in 1, where Leopardi proposes (always using the second plural, 'deducete') to take the *Essai* as a stimulation for a reflection on the non-universality of rules in the arts, or in 9, where the reader is invited to find the reason (again, 'cagione') why classical history is still

able to catch contemporaries' attention. In general, anyway, Leopardi's attitude is very critical: in 3, he defines 'bad' ('male') Montesquieu's method of analysis; in 6, he opposes Montesquieu's explanation of a phenomenon that he does not agree with ('la ragione che reca Montesquieu […] non mi capacita') with an inquiry on the veritable reason ('la ragion vera è questa'); in 8, eventually, he takes an example from Montesquieu in order to enumerate the reason of an analyzed phenomenon ('Ragioni').

It is therefore possible to divide also the references to the *Essai sur le Goût* into two macro-groups, which roughly correspond to the ones individuated for the *Grandeur*, although with radical differences. On the one hand, actually, we witness references to the *Essai* made in order to integrate Leopardi's thought (2, 5): in most of the cases, however, they are indicated as implicitly pleonastic (4, 7, 11, 12). On the other hand, we find instead references where Leopardi corrects Montesquieu, or takes the *Essai* as a point of departure for some new reflection (1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10): it can be remarked that such a distinction is also valid from the angle of the point of view, since this last group witnesses the only two cases in which Leopardi employs the second plural person (1, 9) while the examples of use of the second singular are all concentrated in the first category (4, 7, 11, 12).

Although included in the same book, and one was read immediately following the other, the *Grandeur* and the *Essai* undergo, in Leopardi's reading, two separate and parallel approaches. This is probably due to their foreseen outcomes: while the reading of the *Grandeur* takes place in the context of various 'disegni letterari', aiming to outline, through a comparison of the history of Italian civilisation with that of the rise and fall of ancient empires, a project of engaged writing, the *Essai sur le Goût* provides topics and reflection on Leopardi's 'teoria del piacere'. Perhaps not by chance, Leopardi uses for the first time this expression on page 172 (12-23 July); that is to say exactly between his critique against

Montesquieu's notion of curiosity (p. 171, reference 3) and a reference to Montesquieu about the relative nature of pleasure according to cultural backgrounds (p. 178, reference 5). It can be therefore argued that the definition itself of the "teoria del piacere" arises within the reading of a book proposing itself of 'chercher les causes des plaisirs de notre ame'.[206]

The afterlife of Montesquieu in the 'Zibaldone'

After the first reading of the *Grandeur* and the *Essai*, Leopardi comes back – always more episodically – to the two works read in the summer of 1820. Most of references (nine to eleven) are to the *Grandeur*, which can probably suggest that the *Essai*'s role is almost exhausted. The structure of references shows well this process:

1. V. Montesquieu, Grandeur etc. ch. 8. dalla metà in poi, dove parla dei Censori (**222**, 23 August 1820);
2. (v. Montesquieu ch. 2. in proposito del gran vigore de' soldati romani) (**262**, 5 October 1820);
3. La pura bellezza risultante da un'esatta e regolare convenienza, desta di rado le grandi passioni (come dice Montesquieu), per lo stesso motivo per cui la ragione […] (**269**, 10 October 1820);
4. V. anche Montesquieu Grandeur etc. ch. 10. principio (**274**, 14 October 1820);
5. […]nello stesso modo che dice Montesquieu (l. cit. nel pensiero, a cui questo si riferisce) (**359**, 27 November 1820);

[206] *Œuvres de Monsieur de Montesquieu* (Amsterdam, 1781), p. 366.

6. V. in particolare Montesquieu, *Grandeur* etc. ch. 9. p. 99-101. e quivi le note. […] (ch. 6. fin. p. 80. dove però egli parla sotto un altro rapporto.) (**457**, 24 December 1820);
7. E quanto ai Romani, vedi in questo particolare la fine del Capo 6. di Montesquieu, *Grandeur* etc. (**883**, 30 March-4 April 1821);
8. Tale la schiavitù presso i Romani, della quale v. fra gli altri il Montesquieu, *Grandeur* etc. ch. 17. innanzi alla metà. (**915-16**, 4-6 April 1821);
9. […] la sottigliezza (attribuita già a' Greci: v. Montesquieu Grandeur etc. ch. 22. p. 264) (**1043**, 13 May 1821);
10. Montesquieu *Essai sur le gout* ha alcuni pensieri sulla grazia […] (**1552**, 23 August 1821);
11. Delle forze ordinarie de' soldati romani v. Montesquieu, Grandeur ec. ch. 2. p. 15. nota, p.16. segg. (**1601**, 31 August-1 September 1821);
12. (v. Montesquieu, Essai sur le goût. De la sensibilité. p.392) (**3214**, 20-21 August 1823).

The two references to the *Essai sur le Goût* (3 and 10) do not provide any information except the name of the author; 2 does not even include the title of the work, which can be deduced from the context. The references to the *Grandeur* show a similar metamorphosis, although not that drastic. While the chapter number is always kept, the page number is often dismissed (1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8) and Leopardi refers generally to some point of the chapter (4: 'ch.10. principio'; 7: 'la fine del Capo 6'; 8: 'ch.17. innanzi alla metà') or to a subject there analyzed (1: 'ch.8. dalla metà in poi, dove parla dei Censori'; 2: 'ch.2. in proposito del gran vigore de' soldati romani'). Leopardi provides a complete references only in 6, 9 and 11, so to indicate that the project of summer 1820 – whatever it could have been – is somehow, if not entirely, dismissed.

The use of references also changes widely. Except for 10 (where Leopardi is already developing his own 'theory of the grace', and refers to Montesquieu as one of his sources) Leopardi's references belong all to the 'footnote' category: Leopardi does not discuss Montesquieu's assertions, and rather puts references in order to broaden the perspective, to clarify some concept or to address the reader to some point. This is also underlined by the references' structure: Montesquieu can be evoked among other influences (4: 'V. anche Montesquieu'; 8: 'v. fra gli altri il Montesquieu") or to some very specific point (6: 'V. in particolare Montesquieu'; 7: 'vedi in questo particolare la fine del Capo 6. di Montesquieu'). This may indicate that the parent text has somehow been 'discharged', namely that it has lost – after the first reading – its role as a stimulation to confrontation, and has become a mere source to address the potential reader. On the role of the reader, an eloquent change is testified by 4 ('Vedi in questo proposito la p. 114', which is an internal reference but is projected to the following one to the *Grandeur*) and 7 ('vedi in questo particolare la fine del Capo 6. di Montesquieu'): the use of the second singular form shows that these are references to Leopardi himself, and are therefore for internal use and not projected on a wider scale.

1.b. Paraphrase (A_1-T_2)

The relationship implied by the paraphrase is that of an *index,* what Compagnon defines as 'une relation de *contiguïté factuelle*': the object is 'designated', but there is no 'rapport analogique'; the paraphrase is something else, connected with the parent-text as far as it constitutes itself as a summary or as a rewriting of the other's thought under another form. As we have seen, the model for the structure of the paraphrase can be interpreted using the categories evoked by Frege's essay on *Sinn und Bedeutung*: a text used also by Compagnon,

but which this investigation approaches from quite a different perspective.[207] Using Frege's categories, paraphrase is a form of preserving the *Bedeutung* (= reference, but literally 'meaning') rather than the *Sinn* (normally translated as 'reference' in current English usage, but approachable to the semiotic notion of 'connotation' as well as the saussurian one of 'significant'). Paraphrase is therefore a form of translation: while denoting the same object, it differs from the point of view of connotation, translating the parent text into a different *parole* (which, in this case, is also a different language).

Leopardi paraphrases several passages of the *Essai sur le Goût*: the act of appropriation and introjection implied by the paraphrase fits perfectly the relationship he entertains with this text, a fragment of eighteenth-century aesthetics which becomes the point of departure – as we will see – for his a-systematical theory of pleasure.

Montesquieu […] fa consistere la grazia e il non so che, principalmente nella sorpresa, nel dar più di quello che si prometta ec.	Il y a quelquefois dans les personnes ou dans les choses un charme invisible, une grace naturelle, qu'on n'a pu definer, & qu'on a été force d'appeler le je ne sais quoi. Il me semble que c'est un effet principalement fondé sur la surprise. (394) Paul Véronese promet beaucoup, & paye ce qu'il promet: Raphaël & le Correge promettent peu, & payent beaucoup, & cela nous plaît d'avantage. (395)
E forse anche per questo motivo accade quello che dice Montesquieu, che le grandi passioni di rado sono destate dalle grandi bellezze, ma ordinariamente dalla grazia, perchè l'effetto della bellezza si compie tutto in un attimo, e all'anima dopo che s'è appagata di quella vista non rimane altro da desiderare nè da sperare, se però la bellezza	Nous sommes touchés de ce qu'une personne nous plaît plus qu'elle ne nous a paru d'abord devoir nous plaire, & nous sommes agréablement surprise de ce qu'elle a su vaincre des defaults que nos yeux nous montrent & que le cœur ne croit plus: voilà pourquoi les femmes laides ont très-souvent des graces, & qu'il est rare que les belles en ayent. Car une belle personne fait ordinairement le contraire de ce que nous avions attendu; elle parvient à

[207] Compagnon, *La seconde main*, pp. 83-86. Another reading of Frege's essay in relation to quotation studies is Steven Rendall, 'Translation, Quotation, Iterability', *TTR/Etudes sur le texte et ses transformations*, vol. X, no 2 (1997), pp. 167-189.

non è accompagnata da spirito, virtù ec. Al contrario la grazia ha successione di parti, anzi non si dà grazia senza successione. Quindi veduta una parte, resta desiderio e speranza delle altre.	nous paroître moins aimable; après nous avoir surpris en bien, elle nous surprend en mal: mais l'impression du bien est ancienne, celle du mal nouvelle; aussi les belles personnes font ells rarement les grandes passions, Presque toujours reserves à celles qui ont des graces, c'est-à-dire, des agrémens que nous n'attendions point, & que nous n'avions pas sujet d'attendre. (394-395)
Tuttavia primieramente, siccome la natura, secondo che osserva anche Montesquieu, è ora più difficile a seguire, e più rara assai che l'arte, così notate che quelle grazie che consistono in pura naturalezza, non si danno ordinariamente senza sorpresa.	Il sembleroit que les manieres naturelles devroient être les plus aisées; ce sont celles qui le sont le moins; car l'éducation qui nous gêne, nous fait toujours perdre du naturel: or, nous sommes charmés de le voir revenir. (396-397)
Quantunque la grazia ordinarissimamente consista nell'azione, tuttavia può stare qualche volta anche senza questa, come appunto molte grazie derivanti dalla semplicità, p.e. nelle opere di belle arti, nell'abito di una pastorella, citato anche da Montesquieu come grazioso, insieme colle pitture di Raffaello e Correggio.	Les grandes parures ont rarement de la grace, & souvent l'habillement des bergeres en a. Nous admirons la majesté des draperies de Paul Véronese, mais nous sommes touchés de la simplicité de Raphaël, & de la pureté du Correge. (395)

We perceive since the beginning that Leopardi's paraphrases, although most of them can be referred to specific passages (except 1, where Leopardi combines two separate sentences to define the 'je ne sais quoi'), are never completely faithful; even if Montesquieu's writing is incorporated at a far more than connotative level (as it is shown by the clear and probably unconscious translations of determined linguistic units, like the adverbs 'principalmente'/'principalement' [1] and 'ordinariamente'/'ordinairement' [2]) – the act of paraphrasing implies a sort of condensation-reduction movement, unavoidably leading to a new shaping of Montesquieu's thought, as well as to a re-elaboration of Leopardi's own.

It is through a paraphrase that Leopardi insinuates an equivalence between 'grazia' and 'je ne sais quoi' which is not in the parent text (where 'grace' is only an example of the more

general and indefinable aesthetic category), thus preparing the following assimilation of the aesthetical grace to the theological one (‘In questa materia della grazia così astrusa nella teoria delle arti, come quella della grazia divina nella teologia’) (1). In other words, the ‘je ne sais quoi’ receives, through the act of paraphrasing, a *name*: the paraphrase determines the undetermined, implicitly transferring Montesquieu’s theory to another level of analysis.

This movement is shared by the other passages, where Leopardi seems to constantly broaden the perspective by reshaping the examples of the parent text and analyzing them from a more abstract point of view. Thus, the ‘belles personnes’ of 2 become the ‘bellezze’ and eventually ‘la bellezza’, so to say a purely aesthetic concept; in 3, the opposition between ‘manieres naturelles’ and ‘education’ becomes that between ‘natura’ and ‘arte’; in 4, where Montesquieu extrapolates the ‘je ne sais quoi’ from an enumeration of examples, Leopardi attempts to trace a more abstract dialectic between ‘azione’ and ‘semplicità’.

1.c. Quotation ($S_1[A_1, T_1]$- A_2)

As an *icon*, quotation is shown within the text: while paraphrase denotes the parent-text but does not connote it, quotation implies both operations. The act of appropriation is therefore demanded to other strategies: firstly, the act of detaching the portion of text from the parent work, and secondly the way the passage is inserted in one’s own writing. There are four quotations of Montesquieu in the *Zibaldone*: it is possible to subdivide them into two macro-categories, roughly corresponding to the two ones individuated when treating about the references. The bifurcation is basically due to the two opposite reactions that a reader may have in relation to a thesis, *agreeing* or *disagreeing*: what we had defined as the model of a (potential) footnote, when talking about the references, here becomes an affirmation, while

the model of critique gives birth to manifold rhetoric strategies of confutation. Still, the presence of the quoted text *haunts* Leopardi's writing: both categories involve some manipulation practice, whose outcome is the production of a new meaning.

Affirmation

In this first category, in which I include two of the four quotations (respectively from *Zib*. 192-93 and 457-58), the structure is that of affirmation. Leopardi quotes the parent-text in order to confirm its validity: still, the act of quoting implies a further manipulation, since the quoted portion, once detached from the parent texts, serves different purposes to the original ones.

Souvent ~~l'ame se co~~ notre ame se compose elle-même des raisons de plaisir, et elle y réussit surtout par les liaisons qu'elle met aux choses. Questo e tutto l'altro che dice Montesquieu è notabilissimo, e applicabile a diversissimi casi e condizioni nelle quali ci riesce piacevole quello che ad altri non riesce, e a noi stessi non riusciva in altre circostanze. (*Zib.* 192-93, 29 July 1820)

The quotation comes from page 392 of the original text. In Leopardi's passage, it is preceded by a general reference to the chapters *Des diverses causes qui peuvent produire un sentiment*, *De la sensibilité* and *De la délicatesse*, followed by a reflection in which Leopardi adapted the perspective from Montesquieu's examples to literary tastes. More specifically, Leopardi made reference to the reason why 'c'interessino tanto le Storie romana e greca, i fatti cantati d²a Omero e da Virgilio ec. le tragedie ec. composte sopra quegli argomenti ec. ec.', and why such interest was not by any means comparable to that inspired by other subjects (for example, Ossian's poems): at the end of the passage, a self-reference addresses the reader to the *Discorso di un italiano* ('E v. il mio discorso sui romantici'). The quotation

is therefore inserted in order to broaden the perspective from literature to other 'diversissimi casi e condizioni', most of which, however, belong to the literary and artistic area:[208] the operation of extrapolating the sentence is far more interesting since, in Montesquieu, the annexed examples were not by any means connected with arts, but came all from the semantic area of love or – to be more precise – of the *boudoir*.[209]

In this case, therefore, the quotation is made for agreeing with the parent-text. In a parallel way, it is meant for introducing a caesura within the reflection, separating two different moments of it. Eventually however, the act of quoting – meant as a widening of perspective – shows itself to be, implicitly, a betrayal.

The second example is more subtle. Here too, Leopardi quotes the parent-text in order to support its thesis: still, his agreement is directed towards a passage intended by Montesquieu from another perspective ('sotto un altro rapporto'). In other words, Montesquieu's statements attain their validity, once incorporated in Leopardi's text, for the very fact of having been detached from their context. In other words, Montesquieu's thesis is valid under its formal aspect (*Sinn*), once kept as a void form to be filled with Leopardi's new *Bedeutung*; the

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[208] 'P.e. fu un tempo non breve in cui la poesia classica non mi dava nessun piacere, e io non ci trovava nessuna bellezza. Fu un tempo in cui io non trovava altro studio piacevole che la pura e secca filologia, che ad altri par noiosissima. Fu un tempo in cui le scienze mi parevano studi intollerabili. E quanti nelle loro professioni trovano piaceri, che agli altri parranno maravigliosi, non potendo comprendere che diletto si trovi in quelle occupazioni! E nominatamente in quello che appartiene alle lettere e belle arti, chi non sa e non vede tuttogiorno che il letterato e l'artista trova piaceri incredibili e sempre nuovi nella lettura ~~di~~ o nella contemplazione di questa o di quell'opera, che letta o contemplata dai volgari, non sanno comprendere che diascolo di gusto ci si trovi? E piuttosto lo troveranno in cento altre operacce di pessima lega. Con questo spiegate ancora la diversità de' gusti ne' diversi tempi, classi, nazioni, climi ec.' (*Zib.* 192-93, 29 July 1820).

[209] 'Ainsi une chose qui nous a plu nous plaît encore, par la seule raison qu'elle nous a plu, parce que nous joignons l'ancienne idée à la nouvelle: ainsi une actrice qui nous a plu sur le théâtre, nous plaît encore dans la chambre; sa voix, sa déclamation, le souvenir de l'avoir vu admirer, que dis-je? l'idée de la Princesse jointe à la sienne, tout cela fait une espece de mélange qui forme & produit un plaisir'. It is maybe possible to approach this idea of a connection between love and imagination to Leopardi's conception of love as an illusion, as it is shown in the Aspasia cycle.

Zibaldone broadens the perspective of the parent-text by explicitly declaring a deliberate distortion towards the quoted sentences.

V. in particolare Montesquieu, Grandeur etc. ch.9. p.99-101. e quivi le note. Ainsi Rome n'étoit pas proprement une Monarchie où~~u~~ une République, mais la tête d'un corps formé par tous les peuples du monde... Les peuples... ne faisoient un corps que par une obéissance commune; et sans être compatriotes, ils étoient tous Romains. (ch.6. fin. p.80. dove però egli parla sotto un altro rapporto.) Quando tutto il mondo fu cittadino Romano, Roma non ebbe più cittadini; e quando cittadino Romano fu lo stesso che Cosmopolita, non si amò nè Roma nè il mondo: l'amor patrio di Roma divenuto cosmopolita, divenne indifferente, inattivo e nullo: e quando Roma fu lo stesso che il mondo, non fu più patria di nessuno, e i cittadini Romani, avendo per patria il mondo, non ebbero nessuna patria, e lo mostrarono col fatto. (*Zib.* 457-58, 24 December 1820)

Confutation

In the second category, in which are included two quotations situated respectively on pages 186-87 and 198-99, the structure is that of confutation. The first quotation comes from the chapter titled *Des plaisirs de la symétrie* (pp. 381-82 in Montesquieu's book):

La ragione che reca Montesquieu (Essai sur le goût. Des plaisirs de la symétrie) perchè l'anima amando la varietà, tuttavia dans la plupart des choses elle aime à voir une espèce de symétrie, il che sembra che renferme quelque contradiction, non mi capacita. Une des principales causes des plaisirs de notre ame, lorsqu'elle voit des objets, c'est la facilité qu'elle a à les appercevoir; et la raison qui fait que la symétrie plaît à l'ame, c'est qu'elle lui épargne de la peine,~~ que~~ qu'elle la soulage, et qu'elle coupe, pour ainsi dire, l'ouvrage par la moitiéé. De-là suit une règle générale: par-tout où la symétrie est utile à l'ame et peut aider ses fonctions, elle lui est agréable; ~~p~~mais, par-tout où elle est inutile, elle est fade, parce que~~'~~elle ôte la variété. Or les choses que nous voyons successivement doivent avoir de la variété; car notre ame n'a aucune difficulté à les voir: celles, au contraire, que nous appercevons d'un coup d'oeil doivent avoir de~~l~~ la symétrie. Ainsi, comme nous appercevons d'un coup d'oeil la façade d'un bâtiment, un parterre, un temple, on y met de la symétrie, qui plaît à l'ame par la facilité qu'elle lui donne d'embrasser d'abord tout l'objet. Ora io domando perchè noi vedendo una campagna, un paesaggio dipinto o reale ec. d'un colpo d'occhio come un parterre, e gli oggetti di quella e di questa vista, essendo i medesimi, noi vogliamo in quella la varietà, e in questa le [sic] s~~y~~immetria. E perchè ne' giardini inglesi parimente la varietà ci piaccia in luogo della simmetria. La ragion vera è questa. (*Zib.* 186-87, 26 July 1820)

Here, Leopardi quotes the parent text quite entirely: the thought is therefore meant as a confutation of Montesquieu's theory on symmetry in its whole. The point of departure of Leopardi's reflection is the apparent contradiction individuated by Montesquieu on the pleasures generated by symmetry: although giving completely different reasons, Leopardi shares this consideration, and therefore introduces his quotation literally translating Montesquieu's argument.

La ragione che reca Montesquieu […] perchè l'anima amando la varietà, tuttavia dans la plupart des choses elle aime à voir une espèce de symétrie, il che sembra che renferme quelque contradiction, non mi capacita.	J'ai dit que l'ame aime la variété: cependant, dans la plupart des choses, elle aime à voir une espece de symétrie. Il semble que cela renferme quelque contradiction: voice comment j'explique cela[210].

The other examples shows a quotation from the already mentioned chapter on the 'je ne sais quoi':

Veramente non è grazia tutto quello ch'è sorpresa. Già si sa quante sorprese non ~~c~~abbiano che far colla grazia, ma anche in punto di donne, e di bello, la sorpresa non è sempre grazia. Ponete una bellissima donna mascherata, o col viso coperto, e supponete di non conoscerla, e ch'ella improvvisamente vi scopra il viso, e che quella bellezza vi giunga affatto inaspettata. Quest'è una bella e piacevole sorpresa, ma non è grazia. E per tener dietro precisamente a quello che dice Montesquieu, che la grazia deriva ~~ordinariamente~~ principalmente da questo che nous sommes touch~~è~~és de ce q~~ù~~u'une personne nous plaît plus qu'elle ne nous a paru d'abord devoir nous plaire; et nous sommes agréablemente surpris de ce qu'elle a su vaincre des défauts, que ~~les~~ nos yeux nous montrent et que le coeur ne croit plus, supponete di vedere una donna o un giovane di persona disavvenente, e all'improvviso mirandolo in volto, trovarlo bellissimo; questa pure è sorpresa, ma non grazia. (*Zib.* 198-99, 4-9 August 1820)

Here, quotation is meant to develop Montesquieu's example to its extreme consequences ('per tener dietro precisamente a quello che dice Montesquieu') and therefore confuting it by showing its intrinsic paradoxical nature ('questa pure è sorpresa, ma non grazia').

[210] In these cases, I quote directly from Montesquieu's text, without modernizing the ortography.

Two phenomena will be remaked upon. First, that the movement of translation/incorporation corresponds to a systematic annihilation of Montesquieu's analysis; second, that the inclusion of the quotation (implying, as it is unavoidable, a closer relationship with the other text) penetrates Leopardi's style in a more subtle and subterranean way, as testified in the first example by a French word, not included in the parent-text, emerging at the end of the argumentation ('l'irregolarità in un'opera dell'arte ci choque ordinariamente […] perchè quivi si aspetta il contrario', p. 188), and – in the second example – by two such similar expressions as 'Un viso piccante ed irregolare nous plaît veramente d'abord' and 'molle, insinuante, glissante dolcemente nell'anima' and also by some Italian expressions which are visibly derived from French ('non tutto a un colpo', 'E si vedono tuttogiorno').[211] An analogous phenomenon can be retraced in the already mentioned 'disegni letterari', where Leopardi had written that 'Montesquieu lo dice tutto giorno dei Romani'. In other words (we may say by translating the question into Frege's terms) if the *Bedeutung* is here confuted, the *Sinn* manages somehow to shape Leopardi's writing. The relationship may therefore be formalised as a mutual intersection: while Montesquieu's thesis undergoes a process of repression, we witness a 'coming back of the repressed' at a textual level which literally penetrates within Leopardi's own prose.

[211] In *Zib.* 187 a correction shows a similar slip: 'sy~~y~~immetria'.

CHAPTER 2

SHADOWS OF UNWRITTEN WORKS: THE *CONSIDÉRATIONS* AND THE PROJECT OF A 'POLITICAL BOOK'

As we have seen, references to Montesquieu's *Considérations* in the *Zibaldone* seem to follow a specific strategy and to outline a plan, generally omitting the incorporation of quotes and working as reading notes for a future work. The hypothesis presented here is that the nature of this work can be retraced in Leopardi's 'disegni letterari', and that it can roughly correspond to the 'argomento di un libro politico' outlined in the fifth draft. This chapter will go over Leopardi's reading of the *Considérations*, with the aim of highlighting his reading strategies and the way in which reading turns into a writing project by the engendering of a tension between Leopardi's own writing and the parent text. This will be helpful in clarifying the nature of the projected work, as well as its implications in Leopardi's intellectual development from the points of view of his political theory and his conceptualisation of the opposition ancients/moderns.

2.a. Before and After the Revolution

Montesquieu had published the *Considérations* in 1734. Reflection about Roman history had constantly been an ongoing presence in French thought, engendering a veritable 'myth of Rome' that had been elaborated as an oblique way for conceptualizing politics and outlining

reflections about the author's own political environment (later examples would be Charles Rollin's *Histoire romaine* of 1738-48 and Charles-François Lhomond's *De Viris Illustribus* of circa 1775). In particular, Roman history seems to work as an allegorical frame for reflecting about issues of power, forms of government and the fate of empires, which around 1730, for a French common reader, seems mostly to relate to English monarchy.[212] This connection can explain some features of the writing laboratory in which the *Considérations* are drafted and conceived: although apparently a marginal work, the *Considérations* undergo elaboration in the very same years in which Montesquieu leads his analysis of the English constitution that will constitute the initial framework of the *Esprit de lois*. In parallel, in the very same year, 1734, Montesquieu publishes in Amsterdam his radically militant *Réflexions sur la Monarchie universelle*, which are equally indebted, in terms of hidden paragon, to his apparently merely historical pamphlet on the Romans. The 'untimely topicality' of this work is testified by its remarkable and ongoing editorial success: published in the same year of Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques*, the *Considérations* are immediately translated into English, and then into German (1742) and Italian (1764); Montesquieu himself prepared a new edition in 1748.[213]

Since the title, the *Considérations* are constructed on the opposition between two key antithetic concepts, those of 'magnificence' or 'greatness' (*grandeur*) and of decadence (*décadence*), respectively defining an ascending movement of progress and a descending one of decline. The interaction between these two opposed movements defines a paradigm, which

[212] As Jean Ehrard writes, 'Vers 1730, le parallèle entre la république romaine et la monarchie anglaise est devenu une manière de lieu commun' (preface to Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence*, ed. by Jean Ehrard [Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1968], p. 7-21, p. 9.
[213] See ibid., p. 10.

we could define as an 'organicist' one:[214] a political structure, a given society and in general every cultural phenomenon, like ancient art in Johann Joachim Winckelmann's historical theory, are seen as 'bodies', and therefore subject to a cycle of birth (*Ursprung*), progress (*Wachstum*), flourishing, decay (*Untergang*) and fall (*Fall*), following a set of rules. This 'schéma temporal d'évidence biomorphique' inserts every history within the frame of natural history: as Georges Didi-Huberman points out, Winckelmann's vitalism was grounded in his readings from Pliny, Buffon, the psychological works of J.G. Krüger and Allen's medical writings.[215] In speaking precisely of Winckelmann's *History of the Art of Antiquity* (1764), Alex Potts highlights how the newness of Winckelmann's approach is due to the fact that it 'functioned as a more general inspiration for art-historical studies by establishing a model for conceptualizing the entirety of an artistic tradition through a systematically conceived history of its rise, flourishing, and decline', and namely by applying an organicist paradigm over art history.[216] This approach is rooted in Enlightenment thinking as the main theoretical

[214] The notion of 'Organicism' is taken from Hayden White, *Metahistory*, pp. 15-16: 'The Organicist attempts to depict the particulars discerned in the historical field as components of synthetic processes, At the heart of the Organicist strategy is a metaphysical commitment to the paradigm of the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship; and the Organicist historian will tend to be governed by the desire to see individual entities as components of processes which aggregate into wholes that are greater than, or qualitatively different from, the sum of their parts. [...] It is a characteristic of Organicist strategies of explanation to eschew the search for the *laws* of historical process, when the term "laws" is construed in the sense of universal and invariant causal relationships [...]. The Organicist is inclined to talk about the "principles" or "ideas" that inform the individual processes discerned in the field and all the processes taken as a whole. These principles or ideas are seen as imaging or prefiguring the end toward which the process as a whole tends. They do not function as causal agents or agencies, except in historians with a decidedly mystical or theological orientation, in which case they are usually interpreted as manifestations of God's purpose for His creation'. Or, as Ehrard puts it with specific reference to Montesquieu's work, 'Dieu n'agit que selon des lois générales, et c'est pourquoi la creation est intelligible. De même, l'histoire, selon Montesquieu, offre prise à la raison dans la mesure où elle ne se résout pas en une poussière de faits accidentels' (preface, p. 16).

[215] Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, p. 18.

[216] Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal: Winckelmann and the Origins of Art History* (New Haven-London: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 13.

framework of Winckelmann's operation, which, as always Potts points out, witnesses a 'deep ambivalence as regards the prospects of progress or decline'.[217] 'For many Enlightened intellectuals', Potts continues, 'hopes of improvement, of positive rational change and reform, alternated with anxiety over decline, and a sense of the profound irrationality and corruption of modern art and culture'.[218] The ambivalence between 'grandeur' and 'décadence' is rooted in an Enlightenment tension between the ideal of progress and the 'strong sense of being trapped within an old, tired and decaying society, where positive impulses for change would inevitably be stifled by the persistence of antique, irrational institutions and customs',[219] so that the whole approach of Winckelmann's should be placed 'dans le contexte d'un "pessimisme historique" caractéristique du XVIIIe siècle'.[220]

Works like Winckelmann's, but also like Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-88), and – which is most important to our purposes – like Montesquieu's *Considérations*, emerge therefore from a frustrated revolutionary perspective, thus envisaging 'the larger logic of history [...] as a cyclical rise and decline framing a few chosen "great centuries"' that are proposed as paragons to the present.[221] From this perspective, the notion of 'decline' – grounded in a strong theological and rhetorical tradition, going back to Adam's fall and to the *mundus senescit* topos – was a singularly polysemic one, malleable and capable to denote a multiplicity of acceptations, from 'cosmic' to 'Moral decline, or the decline of "manners"' until political, cultural and economical decline.[222]

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[217] Ibid., p. 26.
[218] Ibid., pp. 26-27.
[219] Ibid., p. 27.
[220] Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, p. 17. The notion of 'historical pessimism' is borrowed from Henry Vyverberg, *Historical Pessimism and the French Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).
[221] Alex Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, p. 258 n. 30.
[222] See the still valid essay by Peter Burke, 'Tradition and Experience: The Idea of Decline from Bruni to Gibbon', in *Edward Gibbon and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed.

Alongside the biomorphic model, we witness therefore, also, 'un *modèle idéal* et, plus particulièrement, métaphysique', grounded in the 'categorical absence' of its object: if 'la mort […] de ce don't on veut énoncer la vérité ou, mieux, la "quiddité"', is a necessary requirement for taking the speech from a historical angle, 'la disparition meme de l'[…]antique fonde le discours historique a en dire l'ultime quiddité'.[223] The eighteenth-century organicist model, grounded in historical pessimism, enacts a strategy of distantiation through which the past is at the same time historicised and narrated, and through which the present can be obliquely described precisely from the perspective of a loss.

The first question we should ask ourselves would be, therefore, how this model for conceptualizing history is reassessed, in the very moment in which Leopardi starts – from his own perspective – engendering a dialogue with the *Considérations*. This is first of all a matter of historical paradigm, but also of a mutated context. As always, Potts highlights, the French Revolution and most of all the radical Jacobin faction, had used Winckelmann's work 'as an inspiration for their hopes of reconstituting a free republic on the model of the antique'; 'for those writing in the aftermath of the French Revolution, in a politically and culturally different world from Winckelmann's, such implications were the nub of the matter'.[224] The same applies to Montesquieu's *Considérations*, whose apparently untimely subject had prophetically epitomised some of the crucial issues of Jacobinism: 'Il faut lire les *Romains* comme une dénonciation du dispotisme menaçant, et surtout comme une méditation sur les conditions concrètes de la liberté'.[225] In the Papal States of the Bourbon Restoration in which Leopardi writes, however, this perspective has necessarily undergone a turn of the screw,

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by G.W. Bowersock, John Clive and Stephen R. Graubard (Cambridge, Mass-London: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 87-102, and more specifically pp. 88-92.

[223] Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, p. 19.

[224] Ibid., p. 26.

[225] Ehrard, preface to Montesquieu, *Considérations*, p. 20.

making the scale incline toward the 'sense of being trapped within an old, tired and decaying society'. In other words, the acknowledgment of the French Revolution and of its failure must imply a swerve in reading. When Leopardi sets 'quello che dice Montesquieu l. c. ch. 13. p. 138. e nella nota' against 'l'esito de' regicidi francesi a' tempi nostri' (*Zib.* 117), the 'differenza de' tempi' is not only that between Roman antiquity and modern times, but also – we can argue – that between Montesquieu's times, preceding and maybe forerunning the Revolution and the Reign of Terror, and the 'Terrore ricordato' of post-1815 Europe.[226] Leopardi's reading of the *Considérations*, and the project itself of the 'political book', is grounded in the acknowledgment that a fracture has taken place, and that the fracture has assumed the shape of the French Revolution.

2.b. Dialoguing with the Text

Intrinsic features of Montesquieu's *Considérations* somehow happen to shape Leopardi's interaction with the text. It has been noted that, compared to Bossuet as a paragon in style, 'Montesquieu préfère la concision de la vérité'.[227] In the *Considérations*, 'les chapitres se fragmentent en paragraphes de longueur inégale mais généralement brefs', in which the author systematically employs such stylistic and rhetorical devices as asyndeton, paradox, antithesis, as well as 'effets de surprise et de désequilibre, [...] formules ramassées, voire énigmatiques'.[228] This stylistic structure contributes to the construction of Leopardi's argument. As we have seen, Leopardi's response to Montesquieu is articulated on a set of scrupulous textual references, generally followed by the 'reason' ('cagione') found by

[226] Reference is here made to Sergio Luzzatto, *Il Terrore ricordato. Memoria e tradizione dell'esperienza rivoluzionaria* (Turin: Einaudi, 2000).
[227] Ehrard, preface to Montesquieu, *Considérations*, p. 12.
[228] Ibid.

Leopardi to the phenomena analyzed by Montesquieu. If we retrace original passages in Montesquieu's text we witness how, conformably to the French author's characteristic style (as Ehrard writes, 'les œuvres de Montesquieu tendent à être des recueils de maximes'),[229] these passages mostly have the shape of aphorisms, thus making of Leopardi's reading a systematic commentary around Montesquieu's judgements.

The pp. 113-125 of the *Zibaldone* appear then as structured as an ongoing gloss to unquoted aphorisms of Montesquieu's. Leopardi does not initially seem to adopt a synthetic gaze: at a first glance, the reading seems to pick noteworthy passages here and there, conformably to the rhapsodic and fragmented nature of the original text. Still, Leopardi's comment shows a strong structure, which this chapter specifically aims to highlight.

Leopardi begins *in medias res*, on p. 113, discussing Montesquieu's hypothesis that a prince is more directly concerned about the state's fate because of his personal belongings: Leopardi's remark is nothing more than a note, but we already perceive the drive towards a universalised perspective, beyond political theory and already in the domain of ethics:

La cagione di quello che dice Montesquieu (Grandeur ec. c. 4. Amsterdam 1781. p. 31. fine) è non solamente che nessun privato perde quanto il principe nella rovina di uno stato, ma eziandio che nessuno crede di poter cagionare quella rovina che non può impedire.

After a quick linguistic note on the same page, Leopardi turns immediately back to Montesquieu, always providing an ethical and psychological explanation of the phenomenon described by the French author:

A colui che occupa una nuova provincia o per armi o per trattato è molto più vantaggioso ~~l'eccita~~ il suscitarci e il mantenerci due fazioni, l'una favorełvole e l'altra contraria al nuovo governo, di quello che averla tutta ubbidiente e sottomessa e indifferente dell'animo. Perchè

[229] Ibid.

la prima fazione essendo ordinariamente più forte della seconda, e perciò questa non potendo nuocere, si cavano da ciò due vantaggi. L'uno d'indebolire il paese ani e renderli molto più incapaci di riunirsi insieme per intraprender nulla, di quello che se tutti fossero indifferenti, il che poi viene a dire tacitamente malcontenti. L'altro di avere un partito per se molto più energico e infervorato di quello che se non esistesse un partito contrario, perchè i principi non dovendo aspettarsi di essere amati nè favoriti dai sudditi per se stessi nè per ragione, debbono cercare di esserlo per odio degli altri, e per passione. Giacchè il contrasto eccita anche quei sentimenti che in altro caso appena si proverebbero, e quello che non si farebbe mai per affetto proprio, si fa per l'opposizione altrui, come i migliori cattolici sono quelli che vivono in paese eretico, e così l'opposto, nè ci ebbe mai tanto ostinati e infocati partigiani del papa come a tempo dei Ghibellini. V. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 6. p. 68. (113-14, 5 June 1820.)

Leopardi employs here the notion of 'contrasto', which already appeared on p. 87 while discussing the Romantics, that would become one of the pivotal concepts of his reflections on grace, in order to analyse the political strategy of *divide et impera*. In parallel, political conflicts are interpreted through the dichotomy nature/reason, thus stating the ultimate uselessness of reason in politics as an explicit anti-Enlightenment move. The universalizing perspective is, however, combined with the hideous presence of the historical moment in which Leopardi writes: the passage about 'the best Catholics' indirectly (and ironically) alludes to the Papal States, and somehow anticipates a reflection of two days later in which Leopardi reaffirms the necessity of 'passion' (as grounded in nature) in every political operation:

La superiorità della natura sulla ragione si dimostra anche in questo che non si fa mai cosa con calore che si faccia per ragione e non per passione, e la stessa religion cristiana che pare ed è alienissima dalla passione,[230] tuttavia perchè l'umano si mescola in tutto, non è stata mai

[230] The analysis of this passage would lead us much too far away from the present subject, but can be partially confirmed by the immediately following – and apparently disconnected from a thematic point of view – passage of the *Zibaldone*: 'Gli antichi supponevano che i morti non avessero altri pensieri che de' negozi di questa vita, e la rimembranza de' loro fatti gli occupasse continuamente, e s'attristassero o rallegrassero secondo che aveano goduto o patito quassù, in maniera che secondo essi, questo mondo era la patria degli uomini, e l'altra vita l'un esilio, al contrario de' cristiani' (116, 8 June 1820). The nature 'alienissima dalla passione' of Christian religion is grounded in its inhumanity, namely in its transcendence and

seguita e difesa con vero interesse se non quando ci ~~è~~erano portati da spirito di parte, da entusiasmo ec. Ed anche ora i divoti fanno come un corpo, e una classe la quale s'interessa per la religione solamente per ispirito di partito, e quindi le loro malignità verso i non divoti o gl'irreligiosi, e l'astio ec. e le derisioni, tutte cose umane e passionate, e non divine nè ragionate nè fatte con posatezza e freddezza d'animo (*Zib.* 116, 7 June 1820)

This reflection allows Leopardi to challenge, in a pretty oblique and indirect way, another crucial problem, whose outcome is political but which is essentially grounded, in Leopardi's view, in a more general cultural perspective. Leopardi is referring here to two passages from Montesquieu's treatise, in which Pompey is said to have 'corromp[u] le people à force d'argent, & mi[s] dans les élections un prix au suffrage de chaque citoyen. De plus,' Montesquieu continues, 'il se servit de la plus vile populace pour troubler les Magistrats dans leurs fonctions: espérant que les gens sages lasses de vivre dans l'anarchie, le créeroient Dictateur par désespoir'.[231] In commenting this passage on p. 114-15, Leopardi agrees that 'l'anarchia conduce dirittamente al dispotismo', and underlines that 'roma non fu mai tanto libera nello senso comune di questa parola, quanto nei tempi immediatamente precedenti la tirannia', making a direct comparison with the relationship between the French Revolution (anarchy) and despotism (Napoleon's empire): 'lo stesso si può dir della francia passata di salto da una libertà furiosa al dispotismo di Buonaparte' (whose name is quite interstingly spelled in the Italian way). Put in this way, the statement would merely be a reactionary consideration, which even Monaldo Leopardi would have agreed with: but Leopardi takes it as the starting point for a further reflection:

I romani non furono mai così f~~o~~ilosofi come quando inclinarono alla barbarie, cioè a tempo della tirannia. E parimen~~t~~ie negli anni che la precedettero, i romani aveano fatti infiniti progressi nella filosofia e nella cognizione delle cose, ch'era nuova per loro. Dal che si deduce

drive towards abstraction, while for Leopardi, at this stage, only everyday life and concrete matter can inspire passion and therefore political action.

[231] Montesquieu, *Considérations*, p. 116.

un altro corollario, che la salvaguardia della libertà delle nazioni non è la filosofia nè la ragione, come ora si pretende che queste debbano rigenerare le cose pubbliche, ma le virtù, le illusioni, l'entusiasmo, in somma la natura, dalla quale siamo lontanissimi. ~~Percio~~ E un popolo di filosofi sarebbe il più piccolo e codardo del mondo. Perciò la nostra rigenerazione dipende da una, per così dire, oltrafilosofia, che conoscendo l'intiero e l'intimo delle cose, ci ravvicini alla natura. E questo dovrebb'essere il frutto dei lumi straordinari di questo secolo. (114-15, 7 June 1820)

Rather than despotism, which belongs to the domain of the political, the veritable target of Leopardi's analysis is 'barbarism' (*barbarie*), which is a more general and cultural decline. It consists, as Leopardi specifies in the immediately following passage, 'non [...] nell~~l~~ difetto della ragione ma della natura'; 'barbaro', he will argument two days later, is the opposite of 'primitivo', given that the former 'è già guasto, il primitivo anc~~h~~ora non è maturo', and the distance between the two is directly proportioned to the distance from nature (118, 9 June 1820). Equally, rather than anarchy or the 'libertà furiosa', what actually precedes and prepares barbarism is the theoretical foreground of a libertarian revolution, namely philosophy: 'chi riflette non opera, e poco immagina, e le grandi illusioni non son fatte per lui' (115, 7 June 1820: 'grandi' is a later addition). In other words, for Leopardi – just like for Winckelmann – the 'primitivo' is the state that we have lost, and with which to engender what Potts, taking an expression from Roland Barthes, has called 'A Lover's discourse'.[232] And, exactly in the same way as in Winckelmann, the first image coming to Leopardi's mind for depicting this pure earliness is that of a body:

Gli esercizi con cui gli antichi si procacciavano il vigore del corpo non erano solamente utili alla guerra, o ad eccitare l'amor della gloria ec. ma contribuivano, anzi erano necessari a mantenere il vigor dell'animo, il coraggio, le illusioni, l'entusiasmo che non saranno mai in un corpo debole (vedete gli altri miei pensieri) in somma quelle cose che cagionano la grandezza e l'eroismo delle nazioni. Ed è cosa già ~~e~~osservata che il vigor del corpo nuoce alle facoltà intellettuali, e favorisce le immaginative, e per lo contrario l'imbecillità del corpo è favorevolissimo [sic] al riflettere, (115)

[232] Potts, *Flesh and the Ideal*, pp. 47-50.

The text stages an opposition between bodily vigour (connected to illusion) and intellectual speculation (related to weakness and 'imbecillità del corpo'): Leopardi's text, for the very simple fact of being written (and leaving aside the troubled and ambiguous self-representation of Leopardi's own body), is *ipso facto* and explicitly situated in a weak age. This is confirmed by another reference to Montesquieu, that Leopardi uses for openly evoking the 'tempi nostri', namely the Bourbon Restoration:

> In quello che dice Montesquieu l. c. ch. 13. p. 138. e nella nota, osservate la differenza de' tempi e vedete l'esito de' regicidi francesi a' tempi nostri. La cagione è che lo spirito del tempo è, come si dice, di moderazione, vale a dire d'indolenza e noncuranza, che ~~un uo~~ ora si allega come per tutta difesa la differenza delle opinioni, quando una volta due persone differenti d'opinioni in certi punti, erano lo stesso che due nemici mortali, e che ancora considerando un uomo come reo e scellerato, la virtù ora non interessa tanto come una volta, da volerlo punito a tutti i patti. Questa vendetta della virtù si voleva e si cercava una volta in contemplazione di essa virtù. Ora che questa si è conosciuta per un fantasma, nessuno si cura di far male agli altri, e procacciarsi odii e nimicizie che son cose reali, per la causa di un ente illusorio. (*Zib.* 117, 9 June 1820)

In the referenced passage, Montesquieu had summarised how those who had conspired against Julius Caesar had all met a tragic fate: 'il étoit bien naturel que des gens, qui étoient à la tête d'un parti abattu tant de fois dans des guerres où l'on ne faisoit aucun quartier, eussent péri de mort violente'.[233] The footnote connected this fact to the execution of the English king, Charles I: 'De nos jours presque tous ceux qui jugerent Charles I, eurent une fin tragique. C'est qu'il n'est guere [sic] possible de faire des actions pareilles sans avoir de tous côtés de mortels ennemis, & par consequent sans courir une infinite de périls'.[234] This example shows how Montesquieu's deterministic perspective has always a rational

[233] Montesquieu, *Considérations*, p. 138.
[234] Ibid, n. A.

grounding: the idea of a 'vengeance céleste, qui punissoit les meutriers de César'[235] is rejected by Montesquieu, and explained on the basis of a rational interpretation of phenomena.

Leopardi pushes however the reflection further: this interpretation, he says, is not valuable for 'our times', and the proof is what happened to the 'regicidi francesi', the veterans of Terror, who did not undergo the tragic fate of Brutus. The reason, for Leopardi, is the 'moderazione' of modern times: the weakness of a philosophizing society leads to the destruction of illusions and therefore to the relativism of 'opinions', in which the other is merely a political adversary and not anymore a 'nemic[o] mortal[e] [...] reo e scellerato'. Virtue itself has become 'un fantasma' (an acceptation that will return in the *Ricordanze*), and thus nothing to fight or die for; the same has happened to vice, which requires a certain amount of 'coraggio' and ardour, explicitly opposed by Leopardi to politics.[236]

Inspired by the reading of Montesquieu, the dichotomy nature/reason-culture seems therefore to germinate, outlining a dialectical movement between anti-intellectual earliness and philosophizing corruption. The closeness to nature determines national identity, and also the collective feeling of the tangible presence of history. Where Montesquieu had noted how, 'depuis les Empereurs, il fut plus difficile d'écrire l'histoire', because 'tout devient secret' and historians are obliged to 'conjecture[r]', Leopardi argues that:

[235] Montesquieu, *Considérations*, p. 138.

[236] The passage is extremely interesting: 'Gli arditi per lo più son cattivi, e il partito buono è quello dei più deboli, perchè non ci vuole ardire per abbracciare il partito ovvio e inculcato dalle leggi dalla natura e dall'opinione sociale, cioè quello della virtù, ma bensì per entrare nel partito odioso del vizio. Il fatto però sta che ~~x~~era già venuto anche per Roma il tempo che la politica dovea prevalere al coraggio come ora, e in tutti i tempi corrotti' (*Zib.* 118, 9 June 1820). This consideration seems to echo analogous reflections by Sade, and to anticipate some features of Nietzsche's thought: Leopardi does not, however, push this thought to its Nietzschean extreme, namely that the notion itself of 'good' is modelled on the interests of the 'più deboli'.

Nelle repubbliche le cagioni degli avvenimenti appresso a poco erano manifeste, si pubblicavano le orazioni che aveano indotto il popolo o il consiglio a ~~pren~~ venire in quella tal deliberazione, le ambascerie si eseguivano in pubblico, ec. e poi dovendosi tutto fare colla moltitudine le parole e le azioni erano palesi, ed essendoci molti di egual potere, ciascuno era intento a scoprire i motivi e i fini dell'altro e tutto si divulgava. Vedete p. e. le lettere di Cicerone che contengono quasi tutta la storia di quei tempi. Ma ora che il potere è ridotto in pochissimi, si vedono gli avvenimenti e non si sanno i motivi, e il mondo è come quelle macchine che si muovono per molle occulte, o quelle statue fatte camminare da persone nascostevi dentro. E ~~la storia è divenuta co~~ il mondo umano è divenuto come il naturale, bisogna studiare gli avvenimenti come si studiano i fenomeni, e immaginare le forze motrici andando tastoni come i fisici. Dal che si può vedere quanto sia scemata l'utilità della storia. V. Montesquieu l. c. ch. 13. fine. (*Zib.* 120)

For Leopardi, in other words, we have veritable history only when the historian is a witness, in the fullest Greek acceptation of the term: 'Like the word indicating the act of knowledge [*eidénai*],' Giorgio Agamben writes, 'so too the word *historia* derives from the root *id-*, which means to see'; '*Hístōr*', he concludes, 'is in origin the eyewitness, the one who has seen. Here too the Greek supremacy of vision is confirmed'.[237] In parallel, the object of historical analysis is assimilated to an automaton, quite curiously the same image that Walter Benjamin will employ for metaphorizing the act of history-making.[238]

In parallel, the closeness to nature determines a more stressed inclination toward 'il materiale e il sensibile', namely to the seduction of tangible objects and actions, and most of all to the visible embodiments of what Michel Foucault called 'the sovereign power'.[239] Montesquieu had spoken of 'uno fatto accusare da Tiberio p. aver venduta colla sua casa la

[237] Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 94.

[238] 'There was once, we know, an automaton constructed in such a way that it could respond to every move by a chess player with a countermove that would ensure the winning of the game. A puppet wearing Turkish attire and with a hookah in its mouth sat before a chessboard placed on a large table. A system of mirrors created the illusion that this table was transparent on all sides. Actually, a hunchbacked dwarf - a master at chess - sat inside and guided the puppet's hand by means of strings. One can imagine a philosophic counterpart to this apparatus. The puppet, called "historical materialism," is to win all the time. It can easily be a match for anyone if it enlists the services of theology, which today, as we know, is small and ugly and has to keep out of sight' (*On the Concept of History*, thesis 1, p. 389).

[239] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. by Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 48 and passim.

statua dell'imperatore, e di un altro ~~ec.~~ che ec.' (*Zib.* 121): the other story concerned Domitian, who had 'fait condamner à mort une femme pour s'être déshabillée devant son image',[240] so that both anecdotes' results actually pivoted around the power of images. And it will be noteworthy to mention that this theme, whose most direct antecedent is the 1818 discourse over Romantic poetry, will be the object of another of Leopardi's literary drafts, immediately preceding that of the 'political book':

> Della natura primitiva trattato dove si espongano a parte a parte le impressioni che fanno gli oggetti sopra l'uomo naturale, sopra il fanciullo, sopra gli antichi (e in questo ti potrà giovare il saggio sugli errori popolari degli antichi, e le altre op. sugli errori popolari) ec. paragonando queste impressioni e il genere di vita che ne risulta con quella dell'uomo incivilito. Poeti antichi e loro modo di veder la natura. Scrittura sacra ec. Immaginaz. de' fanciulli e degli antichi intorno alle nuvole. V. Cesarotti Ossian, Osservaz. al Poemetto della guerra di Caroso.

The 'materiale' appears again on p. 123, this time connected to the 'straordinario', and related to a student demonstration that occurred in Rome: the act of taking the speech and giving a visible embodiment of their protest has produced a more striking and forcible effect than the expression of their requests through a 'memoriale'. Visible actions as such can therefore conjure those passions that civilised life is unable to raise anymore.

In these pages, Leopardi outlines, therefore, a set of binary oppositions defining the fracture occurred between the 'uomo naturale' and 'uomo incivilito', and that can be summarised as follows:

Nature	**Culture**
Healthy society	Decadence
Republic	Despotism

[240] Montesquieu, *Considérations*, p. 157.

Primitivo	*Barbaro*
Bodily health	Bodily weakness
Passion	Reason/Philosophy
Ferocious partisanship	Relativism of opinions
Hatred for strangers	Cultural relativism
Legge di natura	*Legge civile*
Public dimension of politics	Oligarchy
History as eye-witnessing	‘anda[re] tastoni come i fisici’
Imagination-*Materiale/Sensibile*	Intellect-Abstraction

The same opposition, it will be now evident, runs through the whole project for the ‘political book’, in which the adjective ‘political’ is not to be intended in a theoretical sense (namely, a book *about* politics), but in its most radically militant acceptation, and therefore as a veritable pamphlet. The literary draft aims to outline perspectives for bypassing the fracture between ‘uomo naturale’ and ‘uomo incivilito’, transforming the bitter statements of the *Zibaldone* into intellectual engagement against the ‘corruption’ of times: almost every point of the draft can be read as an outcome of the reflection undertaken in June 1820, which can be helpful also in dating the fragment.

Leopardi begins by stating the ‘‘Necessità di rendere la virtù cosa amabile non per ragione ma per passione, e utile’, which explicity echoes the passages of *Zib.* 113 and 116 in which he had asserted that - ‘i principi non dovendo aspettarsi di essere amati nè favoriti dai sudditi per se stessi nè per ragione, debbono cercare di esserlo per odio degli altri, e per passione’ and that ‘non si fa mai cosa con calore che si faccia per ragione e non per passione’. On point six of the draft, Leopardi alludes to ‘Delle cagioni de’ fatti eroici (V. Montesq. P. 215, l. 4)’: Montesquieu’s passage concerned the inability of non-Roman troops to getting accustomed to

the Roman notion of military glory ('les Barbares pris à la solde des Romains, accoutumés à faire la guerre comme la font aujourd'hui les Tartares, à fuir pour combattre encore, à chercher le pillage plus que l'honneur, étoient incapables d'une pareille discipline'), and can be therefore connected to a passage of *Zib.* 123 in which Leopardi had asserted that

> Lo spatrio cioè il trapiantarsi d'un paese in un altro era ~~quasi~~ possiamo dire ignoto agli antichi popoli civili, finchè durò la loro civiltà, segno di quanto fosse il loro amor patrio, e l'odio o disprezzo degli stranieri. Al contrario quando declinarono alla barbarie. (V. Montesquieu Grandeur ec. ch. 2. p. 20. fine e ch. 16. p. 179. e la nota b. ~~e le l'esempio di Costantino~~)

The referenced passages concerned the phenomenon of desertion, which was inconceivable for the Romans but was relatively common for the non-Roman troops, thus matching the different conceptions of war:

> Parmi nous, les désertions sont fréquentes […]. Chez les Romains, elles étoient plus rares: des soldats tirés du sein d'un peuple si fier […] ne puovoient guere [sic] penser à s'avilir jusqu'à cesser d'être Romains.
>
> Les proscriptions de Sévere firent que plusieurs soldats de Niger se retirerent chez les Parthes […]. Le mal continua sous Alexandre. Artaxercès qui rétablit l'Empire des Perses, se rendit formidabile aux Romains; parce que leurs soldats, par caprice ou par libertinage, déserterent en foule vers lui.

The following point of the draft concerns 'un effetto particolare del Cristianesimo' (which could be the different attitude towards earthly life and hereafter described in *Zib.* 116), while the 'Oggetto e conclus. di questo libro' is identified in the 'Nostro ritorno alle illus.' opposed to the 'politica' meant as 'calcolo meccanico', which is exactly the same notion of politics evoked in describing Augustus's political success ('già venuto anche per Roma il tempo che la politica dovea prevalere al coraggio come ora, e in tutti i tempi corrotti', *Zib.* 118). The

final points of the literary draft are entirely pivoted on concepts employed in analyzing Montesqueiu's text:

Della barbarie.
Dell'amore della virtù presso gli antichi […]
Necessità di ravvivare lo spirito nazionale se i principi vogliono aggrandire i loro stati.
Necessità di rendere individuale l'interesse dello stato, il quale è stato cagione della grandezza degli antichi popoli.[241] Montesquieu lo dice tutto giorno dei Romani.

The project of a 'libro politico' results therefore in the project of a militant pamphlet, ideologically monarchical (Leopardi employs the word 'principe', which, although being a translation from Montesquieu's 'Prince', can also be read as an implicit echo of Machiavelli), in which the reasons of the Roman decline are taken as an inspiration for a political project of reactivation of illusion. Incidentally, if the project actually dates back to June 1820, it would be the eloquent symptom of Leopardi's bipolar attitude towards antiquity between the laboratory of the *Zibaldone* and the planning tension of the literary draft: while the *Zibaldone* seems to state the unamendable fracture between the 'healthy' and 'natural' society of the ancients and the corrupted decadence of philosophizing times, the draft seems to outline the possibility for a rebirth of ancient illusions and for a spiritual revolution.

2.c. Leopardi's 'Cinque Maggio'

In 1996 Edoardo Sanguineti published an essay, entitled 'Leopardi e la Rivoluzione', where he discussed the oblique and problematic way in which the presence of the French

[241] The reference is here to *Zib.* 113: 'La cagione di quello che dice Montesquieu (Grandeur ec. c.4. Amsterdam 1781. p.31. fine) è non solamente che nessun privato perde quanto il principe nella rovina di uno stato, ma eziandio che nessuno crede di poter cagionare quella rovina che non può impedire'.

Revolution haunts Leopardi's writing.[242] Sanguineti analyzed passages from the *Zibaldone* of the years 1820-22, in which Leopardi questioned an apparently paradoxical phenomenon:

> Crudele enigma, la Rivoluzione francese è l'ultima illusione di cui l'uomo è stato storicamente capace, alle soglie della geometrizzazione della vita, e dell'instaurazione disperata del vero, ma è, ossimoricamente, l'illusione di quella geometrizzazione medesima. Così il mondo mitico, diciamo pure, in blocco, gli *anciens régimes* delle società, e delle menti, muore, muoiono, celebrando il mito stesso della ragione – e la filosofia, in certa maniera, compie il tentativo [...] di voler filosofica tutta la vita, che è cosa, come leopardianamente sappiamo infatti, meno filosofica tra tutte.[243]

In other words, in the years 1820-22 – after the reading of Montesquieu and the militant project of the political book (and actually immediately after, since the expression 'geometrizzare tutta la vita' is found in the *Zibaldone* on p. 160, of 8 July 1820)[244] – Leopardi reflects on the contradictory experiment of a philosophical move (and therefore intrinsically weak, and characteristic of a declining society) that has, however, and precisely because of its abstract generalisation, generated those illusions that only can produce great actions. The reflection articulated by Leopardi is therefore intimately connected with his reading of Montesquieu and the concurrent planning of the political book: the French Revolution, and modernity as a whole, question Leopardi's conflictual scheme between nature and culture,

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[242] Edoardo Sanguineti, 'Leopardi e la Rivoluzione', now in Id., *Il chierico organico. Scritture e intellettuali*, ed. by Erminio Risso (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2000), p. 113-19. The main themes of Sanguineti's analyisis – like Leopardi's perception of the new phenomenon of urban 'crowds' – were already in his paper 'Invito a Leopardi', presented in 1998 at the Italian Cultural Institute in New York and now in *Giacomo Leopardi: Poeta e Filosofo*, ed. by Alessandro Carrera (Fiesole: Cadmo, 1999), pp. 3-7.

[243] Sanguineti, 'Leopardi e la Rivoluzione', p. 115.

[244] 'La rivoluzione Francese posto che fosse preparata dalla filosofia, non fu eseguita ~~dalla fi~~ da lei, perchè la filosofia specialmente moderna, non è capace per se medesima di operar nulla. E quando anche la filosofia ~~potesse~~ fosse buona ad eseguire essa stessa una rivoluzione, non potrebbe mantenerla. È veramente compassionevole il vedere come quei legislatori francesi repubblicani, credevano di conservare, e assicurar la durata, e seguir l'andamento la natura e lo scopo della rivoluzione, col ridur tutto alla pura ragione, e pretendere per la prima volta ab orbe condito di geometrizzare tutta la vita'.

engendering a paradox which is ‘sogno della distruzione di ogni sogno’ and ‘utopia della cancellazione di ogni utopia’.[245] As Sanguineti correctly acknowledges, the turning point in Leopardi’s analysis is the conceptualisation of the ‘mezza filosofia’: when Leopardi, on 17 January 1821, writes that ‘L'intiera filosofia è del tutto inattiva, e un popolo di filosofi perfetti non sarebbe capace di azione’ (*Zib.* 520), he is basically reaffirming the same judgement articulated while reading Montesquieu; still, even if ‘la filosofia non ha mai cagionato nè potuto cagionare alcuna rivoluzione, o movimento, o ~~m~~ impresa ec. pubblica o pr~~o~~ivata; anzi ha dovuto per natura sua piuttosto sopprimerli [...] la mezza filosofia ~~può esser~~ è compatibile coll’azione, anzi può cagionarla’ (the deletion testifies the choice for a more resolute affirmation). This is precisely what happened in France, where the revolution has paradoxically ‘molto giovato alla perduta morale francese, quanto era possibile 1. in questo secolo così illuminato, e munito contro le illusioni, e quindi contro le virtù’ (*Zib.* 911, 30 March-4 April 1821). Thus, the passage that Sanguineti calls ‘una sorta di epitaffio, e quasi di *laudatio* funeraria, im memoria [...] della Rivoluzione’ is entirely pivoted around the dichotomy nature-virtue/culture-corruption already outlined while reading Montesquieu, tracing the way through which a fully civilised (and therefore depraved) culture has produced that ‘half philosophy’ that can generate action:

sebbene la nazion francese è la più *civile* del mondo, pure ella non conseguì questo impero, se non in forza di una rivoluzione, che mettendo sul campo *ogni sorta di passioni*, e ravvivando *ogni sorta d'illusioni, ravvicinò la francia alla natura*, spinse indietro l'inci~~l~~vilimento (del che si lagnano infatti i bravi filosofi monarchici), ritornò la francia allo stato di nazione e di *patria* (che aveva perduto sotto i re), rese, benchè momentaneamente, *più severi* i loro dissolutissimi costumi, aprì la strada al merito, *sviluppò il desiderio, l'onore, la forza della virtù e dei sentimenti naturali*; *acces~~s~~ee gli odi e ogni sorta di passioni vive*, e in somma se non ricondusse la mezzana civiltà degli antichi, certo fece poco meno (quanto comportavano i tempi), e non ad altro si debbono attribuire quelle azioni dette *barbare*, di cui fu sì feconda allora la Francia. Nata dalla corruttela, la rivoluzione la stagnò per un m~~e~~omento, *siccome fa*

[245] Sanguineti, ‘Leopardi e la Rivoluzione’, p. 117.

la barbarie nata dall'eccessiva civiltà, che per vie stortissime, pure *riconduce gli uomini più da presso alla natura*. (*Zib.* 2334-35, 6 January 1822, emphasis mine)

We can therefore give a preliminary answer to the question of why the 'political book' was not completed: because the action that Leopardi proposed had already been accomplished by the French Revolution, and, most of all, because it required, rather than a mere project of 'reactivation' of illusions (as it had been the intention of the 'political book', and, before, of the so called 'canzoni patriottiche'), a deeper engagement with modernity and its contradictions, those 'vie stortissime' that can reconcile humanity with nature in the fullest of innaturality.

This engagement was, however, not to be pursued by means of political action or writing. Even if Sanguineti reads this last page of the *Zibaldone* as 'il laico, il profano, il vero *Cinque maggio*, comunque, di Giacomo Leopardi'[246] – and even if the political reflection persists in running through the *Zibaldone* – the 'revolution' about which Leopardi thinks remains, first of all, is a cultural one. While stating the opposition between 'legge di natura' and 'leggi civili', Leopardi had added that, while the latter are easily breakable ('la legge civile o umana si può dimenticare o per distrazione o per altro, e infrangerla senza leder la coscienza', *Zib.* 118-19), the former 'non ammette distrazione, e non può accadere che uno la infranga non credendo, perch'ella ci sta sempre nel cuore come un istinto' (119). This dichotomy reverberated into that between 'naturalezza dello scrivere' and the 'chiarezza', seen as the embodiment of modern civilisation in the domain of writing:

La naturalezza dello scrivere è così ~~necessaria~~ comandata che ~~in~~ posto il caso che per conservarla bisognasse mancare alla chiarezza, io considero che questa è come di legge civile, e quella come di legge naturale, la qual legge non esclude caso nessuno, e va osservata

[246] Ibid., p. 199.

quando anche ne debba soffrire la società o l'individuo, come non è straordinario ~~che~~ che ~~che~~ accada (*Zib.* 119)

The task is therefore to produce, in the domain of writing, the same, paradoxical effect that philosophy has produced in the French Revolution: unchaining illusions in the fullest of disillusion, heating up passions precisely by making use of those tools of modernity – the print, the circulation of knowledge granted by the second printing revolution – that have contributed to the 'geometrizzazione' of culture. The mission outlined in the 'political book' reverberates therefore in Leopardi's lucid answer to the problems posed by the circulation of printed culture in modern times, and in those works (the *Operette*, the two *Crestomazie* and finally the *Canti*) aiming to oximorically take advantage of the 'décadence' in order to promote a new form of 'grandeur' in culture.

CHAPTER 3

'JE NE SAIS QUOI'. MONTESQUIEU'S *ESSAI SUR LE GOÛT*, THE UNSAID OF POETRY AND THE CANON

In this chapter I take as my starting point Leopardi's reading of Montesquieu's *Essai sur le Goût*, analyzing how the aesthetic definition of 'je ne sais quoi' provided by the French philosopher give the first inspiration to a reflection of Leopardi's on the nature of poetry, thereby shaping his notion of 'poetic effect' and thus affecting his dissection of the literary canon. So far, the deepest inquiry into Leopardi's elaborations on 'je ne sais quoi' has been that of Raffaele Gaetano's, who explored the topic in a long chapter of his book on Leopardi and the sublime.[247] For several reasons, including Leopardi's multi-faceted and rich vocabulary, as well as the many intersections and superimpositions between the two concepts in Leopardi's Eighteenth-century sources, Gaetano seems, however, to fully insert Leopardi's interest for 'je ne sais quoi' within his more general speculations on the sublime, thereby underestimating – I believe – the radical difference between the two notions in his thought and oeuvre.

As I will show in this section, 'je ne sais quoi'/grace is rather a notion to be connected with Leopardi's literary inquiry. It emerges in the course of his readings of 1817-18, which are still oriented, in terms of theoretical categories, by the pseudo-Longinus's treatise on the *Sublime*. In approaching the problem of an 'Anacreontic' style, however, Leopardi evokes a set of metaphors that he will re-employ in discussing the aesthetic notion of grace.

[247] Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, pp. 371-94.

It has also to be considered how the treatise on the *Sublime* actually provided an already defined alchemy of this aesthetic effect, defining it both theoretically and as a set of stylistic techniques that could be employed in order to produce it. With 'je ne sais quoi'/grace Leopardi is instead facing an 'un-concept', whose nature and techniques are still to be defined. Leopardi actually perceives his elaborations on the topic to be particularly innovative and personal, and the strongest evidence of this is arguably Leopardi's choice of speaking, at some point in the *Zibaldone*, of 'la mia teoria della grazia'.

Moreover, if the sublime was a strongly determined category, whose expressive techniques had substantially remained unchanged since antiquity, 'je ne sais quoi'/grace is a definitely relative and floating notion, which is inextricably linked to historical and cultural differences and whose effect is precisely caused by distance and perceptive rarefaction. Thus, Leopardi states several times that the grace that we perceive in antique texts is fully grounded in our 'modern' condition, as a veritable product of the post-Enlightenment fracture.

Eventually, 'je ne sais quoi'/grace can be defined as an excess that arises in the sphere of the infinitesimal: unlike the sublime, which is grounded in the excess generated by some magnitude in composing poetic images (the 'ardiri'),[248] Leopardi's notion of grace is that of a fleeting presence, whose impalpable nature can be retraced through a vigilant care for details. Indivuating grace involves therefore the interaction of several forms of knowledge and discursive practices, from philology to aesthetics, history and psychology. Quotation is the laboratory in which Leopardi's dissection of 'je ne sais quoi'/grace takes place: the aim is an alchemy of the unsaid of poetry, as well as of the tension and the undecidability derived from the vagueness and polysemy of determined semantic units.

[248] Cf. ibid., 261-83.

This section will first contextualise Leopardi's reading of the *Essai sur le Goût*, analysing how Montesquieu's text crosses reflections that had already been developed in the *Zibaldone* (3.a.). In the second sub-chapter (3.b.) I analyse how Leopardi's paraphrasing embodies and translates the terms of Montesquieu's reflection into those of Leopardi's own thought in the very act of reading. I will then individuate the theoretical background through which the reception of the notion of 'je ne sais quoi'/grace is somehow prepared in the *Zibaldone*, arguing that the emerging of a similar notion as applied to poetry can be retraced in Leopardi's reading of Italian lyrical tradition carried on in 1817-18 (3.c.). In the fourth sub-chapter (3.d.) The construction of Leopardi's 'theory of grace' will be followed, showing how it is constantly connected to the research of a poetic style and of a national literary language. Particularly, the chapter will inquire into the influence of the *Perì hýpsous* not from the point of view of theoretical influence, but rather insofar as it provides Leopardi a paragon in quoting and in leading textual analysis. This leads to an analysis of how the notion of 'je ne sais quoi'/grace determines Leopardi's theory of poetry and his own poetic activity (3.e.).

3.a. Leopardi, France and the *Essai sur le Goût*

In July 1820, as we have seen, Leopardi reads Montesquieu's *Essai sur le Goût*. The *Essai* is hardly more than a fragment, composed of fifteen chapters of variable length: the last one is unfinished, and lacking an author's manuscript the attribution itself of the text is discussed. It is generally identified with the *Encyclopédie*'s article on 'taste' promised by Montesquieu to D'Alembert in a letter of 1753: left unaccomplished because of its author's death, it was posthumously published as a 'fragment sur le goût' complementing the respective article by Voltaire in the seventh tome of the *Encyclopédie* (1757), and later reprinted by Jean-Baptiste

Secondat in a slightly different version (1783).[249] The version read by Leopardi, published in 1781, was therefore the *Encyclopédie* one.

Leopardi's reading is fulminous, and takes place in a very crucial moment of his intellectual development. Still, it is arguable that Leopardi's first approach to the *Essai* is almost circumstantial, and therefore not apparently connected to any strictly aesthetical project. As we have seen, Leopardi had started reading the sixth tome of Montesquieu's *Œuvres* at the beginning of June, making a long and detailed recognition of the *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence* which constituted the volume's most part (pp. 1-284). Later on, Leopardi had entailed a systematic reading of the whole volume, plunging in the *Dialogue de Sylla et d'Eucrate* (pp. 287-300) and in the *Temple de Gnide* (pp. 303-61), and eventually coming across the very short *Essai* (pp. 365-400), on which he had nonetheless spent more than a month, from 6 July 1820 to 17 August of the same year.

Now, as we have analyzed in the first chapter of this section, Leopardi's reading of the *Essai* follows a very peculiar trajectory: references do not actually follow the internal progression of the book, thus testifying a very quick overview of the whole text, and a systematic coming back at a later stage on specific passages. As we have seen, the analysis of the way references are inserted in the author's own prose shows that Leopardi's approach to the *Essai* is far more critical: instead of a footnote modality, tended towards a fragmentation of the parent-text into a set of references that are meant to be authoritative supports to the author's own analysis, in referencing the *Essai* Leopardi adopts a strategy of incorporation, led through paraphrase and through a close discussion of Montesquieu's statements.

[249] 'Fragment sur le goût', *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, t. VII (1757), pp. 761b-767. For the elaboration and the editorial history of the text cf. the critical edition by Charles-Jacques Beyer (Geneva: Droz, 1976), p. 98n.

The reasons for such approach are several. On the one hand, we have to consider intrinsic features of the text, as well as its object and methods of analysis, which are unavoidably connected to the cultural environment in which it was composed. On the other hand, we should situate Leopardi's analysis in the moment in which the reading takes place, which happens to be singularly crucial. As I will show in the following pages, the aesthetical analysis led by Montesquieu provides Leopardi with a theoretical frame (defined in the course of the *Zibaldone* as 'teoria della grazia') in which the linguistic problem of Italian as a literary language can be articulated. In parallel, the *Essai* gives Leopardi several hints for pusruing his own stylistic research for a 'modern' poetic style, which can be equally capable to avoid 'affectation' ('affettazione') and to reach an effect of 'elegance' through the full-consciousness of historical fractures. The reading of the *Essai* crosses hence a subterranean path which is present in the *Zibaldone* since its inaugural moment, namely that of the constitution of an Italian poetic canon: from the first pages onwards, Leopardi seems to indulge towards a historical and anthological way of dissecting the corpus of Italian literature, with the aim of providing the paragon for a national and linguistic identity. Such attitude shapes the *Zibaldone* from its very beginning, and its prelude can be individuated in the spring of 1817, when Pietro Giordani had exhorted the young Leopardi to undertake a wide survey of the classics of Italian literature, and mainly of the fourteenth century. As Giulio Bollati pointed out, the first pages of the *Zibaldone* are the field of tension where Giordani's 'trecentismo' and Leopardi's preference for the sixteenth century collide: on pp. 1-2 (1817),[250] we already witness a 'palese […] opzione per "il colmo della nostra letteratura",

[250] 'Il trecento fu il principio della nostra letteratura, non già il colmo, imperocchè non ebbe se non tre scrittori grandi: il quattrocento non fu corruzione nè raffinamento del trecento, ma un sonno della letteratura (che avea dato luogo ~~a~~ll'erudizione) la quale restava ancora incorrotta e peccava ancora più tosto di poco. Poliziano, Pulci. Il cinquecento fu vera continuazione del trecento e il colmo della nostra letteratura. Di poi venne il raffinamento del seicento, che nel

vale a dire per il Cinquecento, sede privilegiata del modello linguistico a cui mira la ricerca leopardiana',[251] reverberated in the *Zibaldone* and ultimately in the singular choices made by Leopardi in composing the *Crestomazia italiana de' prosatori* (1827). Such attitude is already evident in Leopardi's first attempts at drafting an Italian poetic canon, through the close analysis of 'canzoni' by Petrarch, Testi, Filicaia, Chiabrera, Guidi, Zappi and Manfredi (*Zib.* 23-28, 1818).

At the same time, the reading of Montesquieu intersects Leopardi's aesthetical inquiry, also present since the beginning of the *Zibaldone* as a 'Sistema di Belle Arti' (6) aiming to define such categories as those of 'beautiful', 'sublime', 'terrible' and 'ridicuolous' ('Del Bello/Del Sublime/Del terribile/Del ridicolo e vizioso ec.', *Zib.* 7). Before dealing with Montesquieu's text, Leopardi's analysis is mainly focused on the sublime, encountered as a direct and personal experience during the 'primo amore' for his cousin Geltrude Cassi (December 1817),[252] developed through a close reading of the Biblical sublime inspired by the confrontation with Girolamo Federico Borgno's *Dissertazione* (*Zib.* 13) and nourished, in the very moment of the confrontation with the aesthetics of Romanticism, by a progressive re-reading of the pseudo-Longinus. The reading of the *Essai sur le Goût* reveals then itself to be crucial, in crossing two parallel and interfaced paths of inquiry animating the *Zibaldone* since its auroral phases, and later echoing in Leopardi's own choices as a critic and as a poet, between the two chrestomathies and the 'canti pisano-recanatesi'.

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settecento s'è solamente mutato in corruzione d'altra specie, ma il buon gusto nel volgo dei letterati non è tornato più, nè tornerà secondo me, perchè dal niente si può passare al buono, ma dal troppo buono o siea dal corrotto stimo che non si possa'.

[251] Giulio Bollati, 'Introduzione' to Giacomo Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La prosa*, ed. by Giulio Bollati (Turin: Einaudi, 1968), pp. vii-xcviii, p. lxi.

[252] Cf. what writes on this aspects Franco D'Intino in Giacomo Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, p. xxv.

The polemic confrontation with the *Essai* is also to be framed, I argue, within Leopardi's peculiar attitude towards French culture. Leopardi's perception of France is, at is it well known, radical and ambiguous: for social and political reasons, French is seen as the very language of modernity, and therefore intrinsically anti-poetic and anti-literary.[253] The argumentation is widely articulated within the *Zibaldone*, through the persistent and harsh judgement about French as an intrinsically prosaic language, which is not therefore suitable to poetry. Already in 1818, while commenting two lines of Voltaire's *Henriade*, Leopardi notes that Voltaire's language possesses a certain technicism (*tecnicismo*) that can work with prose, but not at all with poetry (*Zib.* 31). In 1820, he underlines how 'La poesìa e la prosa francese si confondono insieme, e la Francia non ha vera distinzione ~~di poesìa~~ e prosa e di poesia'. The example is still the *Henriade*, characterised by those linguistic features which had made of French the language of eighteenth-century 'culture of conversation': '*enjouement*', '*esprit*', 'aria di conversazione', 'giuoco di parole di frasi di maniere e di sentimenti e sentenze' (*Zib.* 373, 2 December). In Leopardi's analysis, French is an anti-poetic language because of its geometrical determinacy, as well as for the incapability of French culture to 'ben sentire e gustare le lingue forestiere, massime le antiche' (*Zib.* 1902, 12 October 1821). From this perspective, Leopardi distinguishes between 'termini' (meant as linguistic units belonging to a technical language, with a mainly denotative function) and 'parole', whose nature is rather connotative and are therefore more apt to engender poetic effects:

> la lingua francese, che nei suoi modi quasi geometrici si accosta alla qualità di quelle voci che noi chiamiamo termini, e di più, massimamente oggi, abbonda quasi più di termini, o pressochè termini, che di parole, è di sua natura incapace di vera poesia, e di veramente bella letteratura. (*Zib.* 1253, 30 June 1821)

[253] 'Ho detto più volte che la letteratura francese è precisamente letteratura moderna, ed è quanto dire che non è letteratura' (*Zib.* 1174, 16 June 1821).

The 'lingua poetica' is a 'lingua non matematica, anzi contraria per indole allo spirito matematico' (*Zib.* 2418-19, 5 May 1822), and should be characterised by a certain 'vagueness' and indeterminacy in details. French, on the contrary, is absolutely mathematical, since it is definitely determined.[254]

However, Leopardi's opinion about French becomes, within the *Zibaldone*, interestingly ambiguous. French is a language that is able to reach poetic effects precisely because of its determined and 'mathematical' nature, because – despite being absolutely un-poetic ('lingua la più impoetica fra le moderne, che sono le più impoetiche del mondo') – it actually obliges the writer to confound poetic and prosaic language, thus giving birth to a sort of poetic prose ('come il poeta francese scrive prosaicamente così il prosatore scriva poeticamente', *Zib.* 2666, 2 February 1823). Furthermore, the extremely poor nature of French produces the paradoxical effect of an overwhelming necessity of 'metafore […] metonimie […] catacresi […] mille figure di dizione che rendono poetica la lingua della prosa': 'gonfia, concitata ed aliena', French prose is obliged to recur to 'frasi necessarie e forzate' characterised by a certain vagueness ('les auteurs de ses jours, des ~~g~~jours de quelqu'un, de celui-là etc.'), therefore compelling the author to 'formar loro un contorno conveniente, a seguire una forma di dire, uno stile, dove queste frasi, figure ec. non disdicano, e quindi a innalzare il tuono della sua prosa' (*Zib.* 2666-68, 2 February 1823). Quite ironically, French prose has then reached the 'indigesta e informe' (and therefore poetic) nature of Hebrew (*Zib.* 2909, 7 July 1823), a language explicitly opposed to French in a passage of 1 October 1823:

> La prosa ebraica era dunque poetica per difetto e mancamento, e perchè la lingua scarseggiava di voci. Non così la prosa francese, la qual è per lo più poetica, mentre la lingua abbonda di

[254] French is a language 'assuefatissima e proprissima ai dettagli, perch'ella ha parole per significare fino alle più ~~pic~~ menome differenze delle cose, […] e vince in questo forse tutte l'altre lingue antiche e moderne' (*Zib.* 3634, 8 October 1823).

voci […] Ma essa prosa è poetica perchè la lingua francese scarseggia, e si può dir, manca di voci poetiche, ~~di~~ cioè di voci antiche ed eleganti propriamente, cioè peregrine ec. (*Zib.* 3566)

Such considerations are not uniquely theoretical. The problem of a poetic prose crosses Leopardi's reflection for many years, and it is arguable that, when he decided to face modernity in a direct and open way, he must have had in mind the singular fate of the modern language *par excellence*; the letter to his father of 8 July 1830 is in this sense explicit, in admitting how Leopardi's intention, in writing the *Operette morali*, had been 'di far *poesia in prosa*, come s'usa oggi'.[255]

Now, Leopardi's ambiguous miso-Gallicism has ancient roots, reconstructed by Bollati in his introductory essay to the chrestomathy of the prose,[256] and whose formally patriotic nature is definitely to be connected to deeper ideological reasons.[257] The ambiguous relationship staged by Leopardi in his confrontation with French seems to validate this hypothesis of broadening the perspective. France is perceived, since the beginning of the *Zibaldone*, as the land of modernity and of foreignness, as a negative paragon which is, however, characterised by a peculiar charm. Such an acknowledgment is already fully Leopardian, if Leopardi himself had theorised the intrinsic fascination of whatever is foreign and 'pellegrino', ultimately admitting that he would more likely fall in love with a foreign woman than with an Italian one.[258] France is an early presence in the *Zibaldone*: as Bollati correctly reconstructs, the first judgments on French language and literature were grounded in Leopardi's

[255] *E*, vol. II, p. 1740. For a wider contextualisation of such a statement cf. Franco D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, pp. 184-91.
[256] Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La prosa*, pp. liv-lix.
[257] Ibid., p. liii.
[258] 'Se fosse possibile che io m'innamorassi, ciò potrebbe accadere piuttosto con una straniera che con un'italiana' (*Zib.* 4293, 21 September 1827).

compulsive frequentation of Noël's and Delaplace's *Leçons françaises* (1804),[259] read in an edition of 1810[260] and whose first sure allusion is to be found in a reference to Barthélémy of August 1820.[261] Noël's anthology shapes Leopardi's reception of French culture since the beginning, acting as a wide repertoire of intertextual references and – which is more important to our present purpose – as a paragon of fragmentation and restructuration of literary tradition; the main outcome of such an attitude is of course the chrestomathy of 1827, where Noël is obliquely mentioned in the preface (where Leopardi speaks of 'libri di questo genere […] in Francia ed in altre parti'), but is explicitly evoked in the first project presented to Stella.[262] The choice of going back to the roots of Greek tradition, and therefore to title the book as *Crestomazia*, responds then to Leopardi's classicist instances (in the same way as the 'disegno letterario' of a 'Biblioteca Foziana del secolo 18º' sketched in 1826):[263] still, it arguably hides a shade of anxiety of influence towards Leopardi's French precursor, the secret (and unwilling) paragon of Leopardi's 'mimetismo', of his notion of literature as a 'linguaggio separato, mediato, *artificiale*'.[264]

It is then clear how the confrontation with Montesquieu as a visible emblem of 'Frenchness' engenders an unavoidable tension within Leopardi's own reflection, in the moment in which it is directed towards a definition of style and the establishment of a poetic

[259] 'Le *Leçons*, noi crediamo, sono uno dei libri che Leopardi frequentò e consultò abitualmente a partire almeno dal 1817-18: i primissimi pensieri dello *Zibaldone* sulla lingua e la letteratura francese potrebbero essere stati influenzati dall'antologia del Noël' (ibid., p. xliv).
[260] Jean-François Noël, Delaplace, *Leçons de littérature et de morale, ou Recueil en prose et en vers des plus beaux Morceaux de notre Langue* (Paris, 1810).
[261] Giulio Bollati, 'Introduzione' to Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La prosa*, p. xliv.
[262] 'Verisimilmente Ella conoscerà l'Antologia francese in prosa, del sig. Noël, opera che ha avuto un applauso e uno spaccio grandissimo in Francia, con ripetute edizioni, e che riesce tanto piacevole a leggersi, anche agli stranieri, e che mira atutt'altro che a studi di lingua' (19 September 1826, *E*, vol. I, p. 1242).
[263] *TPP*, p. 1111.
[264] Giulio Bollati, 'Introduzione', p. lxxvii.

canon. Raffaele Gaetano wonders at Leopardi's disagreement with Montesquieu: 'perché egli ritiene di dover prendere le distanze […] da un *maître-à-penser* della sua estetica relativistica qual è il filosofo dell'*Essai sur le Goût*?'.[265] My hypothesis is that such disagreement is possible because the confrontation with Montesquieu (and, more in general, with the eighteenth-century French notion of 'taste') is not articulated in the field of aesthetics, but rather implies a wider battle on the terrains of poetic style and of the construction of a literary and political perspective for Italian culture. The relationship, as I have said, is a conflictual and ambiguous one. On the one hand, Montesquieu's culture is the same of that Voltaire-like *esprit* blamed as intrinsically anti-poetic in the very same year 1820; on the other hand, French culture, as mediated by Noël, provides Leopardi an undeclared and subterranean paragon for dissecting, quoting and anthologizing the corpus of literary tradition. Facing French thought, as embodied and epitomised by Montesquieu, is then necessary to the development of Leopardi's own one, in the moment in which he acknowledges his own metamorphosis into 'filosofo di professione (di poeta ch'io era)' (*Zib.* 143-44, 1 July 1820) and elaborates such a key notion in his own intellectual development as the 'teoria del piacere' (firstly defined as such, as we have seen, in *Zib.* 172, written between 12 and 23 July 1820).

It is remarkable, I think, that both Leopardi's self-constructuon as a 'philosopher' (although and because of having previously been a poet), and the notion of the 'teoria del piacere' as the elected common ground on which poetry and philosophy are called to interact, concurrently emerge in the course of Leopardi's confrontation with the *Essai sur le Goût*. The more, they evolve around a concept – that of 'je ne sais quoi' – analysed by Montesquieu in reference to a ramified previous tradition, singularly dissected by Leopardi (who frames it

[265] Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, p. 374.

immediately within the notion of 'grace'), and which I decide to take as the pivotal point of this chapter, analyzing its role in Leopardi's progressive construction of an Italian poetic canon as well as in his definition of a poetic language.

3.b. 1817-1820. Building a theory of poetry

Since its beginning, the *Zibaldone* shows two parallel paths of inquiry, almost immediately revealing themselves to be more strictly interwoven than it would initially seem. On the one hand, we witness the attempt to the construction of a 'Sistema di Belle Arti', an expression that appears for the first time, as we have seen, in *Zib.* 6. Leopardi's attitude is taxonomical, and the paradigm is that of a strong schematisation, to be systematised into tables (as in *Zib.* 7-9). The cornerstones of such a reflection are the natural aversion of human nature against boredom, and the necessity for art to excite and wonder imagination, a notion interestingly rendered through a misquotation from Gravina's *Ragion poetica*.[266] The role of arts is therefore to please ('diletto') through the imitation of nature, and not to be socially useful ('utile'), although this can however be a secondary effect. Far more than merely stating a mimetic function for the arts, Leopardi uses, however, such a theoretical frame in order to convey two further and more radical considerations. First, the imitation of nature should be

[266] 'la gran facoltà delle arti imitative di fare per lo straordinario modo in cui presentano gli oggetti comu~~x~~ni, vale a dire così imitati, che si considerino nella poesia, dovechè nella realtà non si consideravano, e se ne traggano quelle riflessioni ec. ec. che nella realtà per esser comuni non somministravano ec. ec. come il Gravina nella Ragion poet.' (*Zib.* 16). Gravina had just said that poetry predisposes the reader towards fiction in the same way as nature predisposes man towards reality, thus defining a mimetical conception of poetry as it had been stated many times in classical literature on the subject. Leopardi goes further, saying that poetry has the power of rendering interesting even the most banal things: an eloquent semantic sliding, endowing Gravina's concept with a fresher approach.

totalising, and therefore not uniquely focused on beauty.[267] What catches Leopardi's attention is the charming power of imperfection, which, at this stage, is still uniquely identified with the sublime: the notion of imperfection will witness an interesting afterlife in the *Zibaldone*, connected with grace,[268] to the charm of ancient heroes,[269] to the abstract nature of obliquous perceptions and ultimately to philosophy itself. 'La filosofia che per se stessa spegne del tutto la speranza,' writes Leopardi on 26 September 1821, 'non può cagionare all'animo uno stato piacevole, se non essendo una mezza filosofia, ed imperfetta' (*Zib.* 1793): on 11 December of the same year, he will write that the 'sola virtù che sia e costante ed attiva, è quella ch'è amata e professata per natura e per illusioni', something that philosophy cannot reach 'se non mentre ell'è imperfetta' (*Zib.* 2245). Imperfection is therefore something connected with the very inner core of human nature, which makes every kind of absoluteness (in beauty, in sublime, in philosophical abstraction) a deshumanised construction. Second, such reflection brings Leopardi to the acknowledgment of the radically relative nature of aesthetic feelings: an analysis of the arts should never be disjointed from the knowledge of 'quello che siamo assueffatti a vedereci' (*Zib.* 8), namely from a psychological and/or historical consideration of the audience's point of view, determined by cultural, geographical or individual contingencies.

On the other hand, in the same pages Leopardi undertakes a historical overview of Italian literature. Although influenced, as we have seen, by Giordani's primitivistic taste, Leopardi had almost immediately framed the evolution of national literary language within very

[267] 'se [l'oggetto delle Belle arti] fosse il bello, piacerebbe più quello che fosse più bello e così si andrebbe alla perfezion metafisica, la quale in vece di piacere fa stomaco alle artei' (*Zib.* 2).

[268] 'un viso […] imperfetto, e irregolare, fa ordinariamente più fortuna di un viso regolare e perfetto' (*Zib.* 200, 4-9 August 1820); 'I militari sogliono piacere singolarmente alle donne, ancorchè talvolta resi imperfetti da qualche disgrazia ndella guerra' (*Zib.* 1774, 23 September 1821).

[269] 'Ogni eroe è imperfetto. Tali erano gli eroi antichi' (*Zib.* 471, 3 January 1821).

personal categories and conceptualisations, thus eliding the prominence of the fourteenth century in favour of a disjointed and intermittent historical perspective. The vocabulary of such analysis is already typically Leopardi's, made of recurrent processes of 'corruzione', 'risorgimento' and 'ricadimento' through which the linear myth of a lost golden age, as somehow presupposed by the primitivist utopia, is implicitly questioned. At the same time, Leopardi's theorisation is definitely more fluid, grounded in the opposition between the ancients' 'naiveté' and the moderns' 'corruption', not without, I think, libertine nuances.[270]

The reading of Montesquieu, who had stated that to make art (or poetry) in modern times is basically a 'travailler à être naïf', will then be inserted in such conceptual frame. This is precisely the perspective from which that the two plans of the 'sistema di Belle Arti' and of literary canonisation interact. In *Zib.* 12, for example, Leopardi reflects on two problems that we could define as cultural transmission. On the one hand, he notes, the Latin and Italian signifier 'nausea' manifestly expresses its meaning in a phonological way, namely in the very moment of pronunciation, while the French 'nausée', in pronouncing the diphthong as a 'o', has lost its original meaningfulness. On the other hand, in the same page and via an example from Lucian, Leopardi considers how a translation should not only render the meaning of lexical units, but also the 'impressione' it made to original readers, for example, in case it was a neologism or an anacoluthia. In these two examples, Leopardi applies to literary problems the same relativism adopted in the 'sistema di Belle Arti', whose outcome is a centrality of the 'role of the reader'.[271] A literary activity implies then, since the initial phase of Leopardi's thought, a strongly performative aspect, a consideration for the audience that has to be grounded in social and historical consciousness.

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[270] '[Gli antichi] eran~~co~~o come fanciulli che non conoscono i vizi, noi siamo come vecchi che li conosciamo ~~p~~ ma pel senno e l'esperienza gli schiviamo' (*Zib.* 4).
[271] My reference is of course to the English translation of Eco's *Lector in fabula*.

In the very same page, Leopardi also introduces a reflection that he will later develop in a more defined way: 'L'arte di Ovidio di metter le cose sotto gli occhi, non si chiama efficacia, ma pertinacia. ec.' (*Zib.* 12). Isolated as such, it could stand as an extemporaneous note: still, on page 21, Leopardi goes back to the same consideration, and again within the categories that he has elaborated concerning arts. Art should not only imitate nature, writes Leopardi, but it should also imitate it naturally. Ovid, on the contrary, is not natural at all:

[Ovidio] senza naturalezza la dipinge [la Natura], cioè va tanto dietro ~~dietro~~ a quegli oggetti, che finalmente ce li presenta, e ce li fa anche vedere e toccare e sentire, ma dopo infinito stento suo, (così che a lui bisogna una pagina per farci veder quello che Dante ci fa vedere in una terzina) e con una più tosto pertinacia ch'efficacia; presto sazia, e ~~poi~~ inoltre non è molto piacevole, perchè non sa nasconder l'arte, e con quel tanto aggirarsi intorno agli oggetti (non solo per una pericolosa intemperanza e incontentabilità, ma anche perchè egli senza molti tratti non ci sa subito ~~fi dipinger~~ disegnar la figura, e se non fosse lungo non sarebbe evidente) fa manifesta la diligenza, e la diligenza nei poeti è contraria alla naturalezza.

The problem of imitation is definitely transferred into the domain of poetry, and therefore connected with those of naturalness and 'negligenza'. This latter is a form of natural and aristocratic nonchalance (later to be identified in Baldassar Castiglione's 'sprezzatura'), which becomes a discreet feature of style, possessed by the 'ancients' (such as Dante and Ariosto) but not by the'moderns' (such as Ovid and the Romantics).[272]

Quello che nei poeti dee parer di vedere, oltre gli oggetti imitati, ~~dev'esser~~è una bella negligenza, e questa è quella che vediamo negli antichi, maestri di questa necessi~~i~~arissima e sostanziale arte, questa è quella che vediamo nell'Ariosto, Petrarca ec. questa è quella che pur troppo manca anche ai migliori e classici tra i moderni, questa è quella che col sentimentale e col sistema del Breme, e nelle poesie moderne de' francesi, non si ottiene, e poi non si ottiene; chè questo s~~ent~~esso sentimentale ~~abbisogna di una ma~~ scopre una certa diligenza ec. scopre insomma il poeta che parla ec. In Ovidio si vede in somma che vuol dipingere, e far quello che colle parole è così difficile, mostrar la figura ec. e si vede che ci si mette; in Dante n~~è~~è: pare che voglia raccontare e far quello che colle parole è facile ed è l'uso ordinario delle parole, e dipinge squisitamente, e tuttavia non si vede che ci si metta, non indica questa

[272] Also the notion of 'ancientness' is, of course, absolutely relative.

circostanziola e quell'altra, e alzava la mano e la stringeva e si voltava un tantino eche [sic] so io, (come fanno i romantici descrittori, e in genere questi poeti descrittivi francesi oinglesi [sic], così anche prose ec. ~~cos~~ tanto in voga ultimamente) insomma in lui c'è la negligenza, in Ovidio no.

As Leopardi lucidly acknowledges, what is at stake is here a conflict between nature and reason. The polemical answer to Breme is wholly inserted within this theorisation, leading to the remarkable turn in Leopardi's theory of illusions of page 23. Here, the conflict nature/reason and the natural attraction of men for marvel and wonder as theorised in the 'sistema di Belle Arti' undergo an eloquent shift, which transfers 'illusions' into the domain of the political: the page is arguably sketched in the summer of 1818, when Leopardi is drafting an 'Argomento di una Canzone sullo stato presente dell'Italia'. It can be hence said that this page can be considered as a sort of 'laboratory' for the song 'All'Italia', as the following paragraphs seem to suggest:

E la ragione facendo naturalmente amici dell'utile proprio, e togliendo le illusioni che ci legano gli uni agli altri, scioglie assolutamente la società, e inferocisce le persone.

Anche l'amore della maraviglia par che si debba ridurre all'amore dello straordinario e all'odio della noia ch'è prodotta dall'uniformità.

[…]

Non è favoloso ma ragionevole e vero il porre i tempi Eroici tra gli antichissimi. L'eroismo e il sagrifizio di se stesso e la gloriosa morte ec. di cui parla il Breme Spettatore p. 47, finiscono colle illusioni, e non ~~ce c'è c'e cè~~ è un minchione che le voglia in se, in tempi di ragione e di filosofia~~;~~, come sono questi, ch'~~è~~essendo tali, sono anche quello ch'io dico cioè privi affatto d~~'~~i eroismo. ec.

The spirit in which 'All'Italia' is elaborated is precisely that of the research of this 'heroism' by means of poetic eloquence. In order to reach such effect, Leopardi undertakes an analysis of the Italian lyrical tradition, randomly led through the reading of seven authors who were present in his library: Petrarch (whose works Leopardi had in several editions), Fulvio

Testi (*Poesie liriche*, Venice 1693), Vincenzo Filicaja (*Poesie Toscane*, Parma 1726), Gabriello Chiabrera (*Poesie*, Venice 1608 and *Opere*, Venice 1782), Alessandro Guidi (*Poesie*, Venice 1730), Giambattista Felice Zappi (read in an anthology of 'Arcadi' published in Venice in 1757) and Eustachio Manfredi (*Rime*, Bologna 1732). Leopardi's reading is selective, mainly focusing on the 'Canzoni', being the genre which is more directly involved in his current project. It is equally systematic: speaking of Guidi, he writes that he has 'lette tutte le sue canzoni', and it is arguable that he must have also done the same with the others. The reading criteria follow a homogeneous structure: after having read each author, Leopardi sketches a brief note in the *Zibaldone*, generally dissecting the author's oeuvre from the points of view of 'eloquence', of 'images' and of 'sentenzie', sometimes accompanying his judgements with quotations. This partition is arguably derived from the pseudo-Longinus's treatise on the *Sublime*, that Leopardi presumably read in Jean Toup's bilingual edition published in Oxford in 1778.[273] In the *Perì Hýpsous*, the 'fontes […] fœcundissimi Sublimitatis' were retraced in the 'facultas dicendi', in the 'felix in sensibus audacia', in the 'vehemens et quasi numinis afflatus conceptus Affectus', in 'certa quædam figurarum conformatio', in the 'splendida Elocutio' and in 'magnifica elataque Compositio'.[274]

Eloquence is the first core of Leopardi's analysis: derived from affection ('Quell'affetto nella lirica che cagiona l'eloquenza', *Zib.* 23), its maximal example is Petrarch, who willingly indulges 'più dolcemente massime nel tenero' and who presents not only a remarkable abundance ('copia') of affective images, but also 'movimenti pieni *toū páthous*', being 'tutto quello che forma la vera e animata e calda eloquenza' (*Zib.* 24). Eloquence is therefore

[273] *Dionysius Longinus*, ed. by Jean Toup (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1778). On the identification of Leopardi's source with Toup's edition, rather than to Gori's Italian translation, I agree with Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, pp. 111-16. See p. 111n. for an exhaustive profile of Toup's philological activity.

[274] I quote from the third edition, *Dionysii Longini quæ supersunt*, ed. by Jean Toup and David Ruhnken (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1806), pp. 63-64.

explicitly grounded in the pathetic, and this is presumably the reason why Tasso is defined, a few pages later, 'eccetto il Petrarca, […] il solo italiano veram. eloquente': 'non potendosi cercare i luoghi comuni quando si parla di cosa propria,' writes Leopardi, 'dove necessariamente detta la natura e il cuore, e si parla di vena, e di pienezza di cuore', Tasso's misfortunes led him to naturally avoid affectation, 'essendo questo un campo dove l~~a~~e passioni e l'interesse e la profonda cognizione ec. non lasciano campo all'affettazione e alla sofisticheria ~~e al~~ cioè alla massima corrompitrice dell'eloquenza edella [sic] poesia' (*Zib.* 29).

If eloquence has hence most to do with the author's personality, this is not the case of the 'immagini', whose composition is instead entirely technical. 'Immagini', Leopardi states following the pseudo-Longinus, are directly connected to the sublime, concurrently made of 'originalità e novità' in 'concetti e […] invenzioni' (*Zib.* 23) and of the 'accozzamento *tōn lemmáton* […] cioè di certe parti della cosa che unite insieme formano rapidamente il sublime, e un sublime […] rapido inaffettato e in somma pindarico' (*Zib.* 24). Leopardi's critical vocabulary, at this stage still under construction, makes strong efforts to catch the presence of the sublime in style, as well as it is corruption – in Testi and Chiabrera – by a 'seicentismo' seen as a dirtying cover ('canzone […] malamente e sporcamente e visibilm.e tenacem. imbrattata della pece del suo secolo'; 'macchiuzze'; 'qualche macchia di seicentisteria', *Zib.* 23 and 25). Quotations isolate examples, in order to save fragments from compositions, as those of Chiabrera, which 'non sono per la maggior parte altro che bellissimi ~~ab~~ abbozzi' (*Zib.* 26). This kind of sublime is grounded in disconnection and arrhythmia: Chiabrera, writes Leopardi, is 'sovente sconnesso', and this can be also intended as a praise of the 'verità dell'imitaz. dell'affetto e dell'estro' (25); 'è bene che il lettore stia sempre tra le immagini' (*Zib.* 26), continues Leopardi, and images must be composed in order to '*hepipléttein* il Lettore', to 'strascina[re' him and 'sbalza[rlo] qua e là stordito e confuso a

voglia loro' (*Zib.* 27).[275] Such an effect will be later explained by the close reading of a passage from Horace, led in the style of the pseudo-Longinus's quotation practice:

Questi effetti che ho specificati li produce Orazio a ogni tratto, coll'arditezza della frase, onde dentro il giro di un solo inciso vi trasporta e vi sbalza più volte di salto da una ad altra idea lontanissima e diversissima. (Come pure coll'ordine figuratissimo delle parole, e colla difficoltà, e quindi attività ch'esso produce in chi legge.) Metafore coraggiose, epiteti singolari e presi da lungi, inversioni, collocazioni, ~~co~~ soppressioni, tutto dentro i limiti del non eccessivo (eccessivo potrebb'essere pei tedeschi, troppo poco per gli orientali) ec. ec. producono questi effetti in qualsivoglia luogo delle sue poesie.
Pone me pigris ubi nulla campis
Arbor aestiva recreatur aura,
Quod latus mundi nebulae, malusque
Iuppiter urget.
Eccovi prima la pigrizia, poi questa applicata ai cam~~b~~pi, e immediatamente gli alberi, e l'aria d'estate, poi un fianco del mondo, poi ~~le~~ le nebbie, e poi Giove in vece del cielo, e ~~avverso,~~ malvagio in vece di contrario, che urtano o spingono o perseguitano quella parte di mondo.
La vivezza e il pregio di tutto ciò (~~e~~come di tante simili bellezze in altri stili) non consiste in altro che nella frequenza, e nella lunghezza dei salti da un luogo, da un'idea all'altra. Le quali cose derivano dall'arditezza dell'elocuzione materiale. (*Zib.* 2051-52, 4 November 1821)

Leopardi considers also the possibility for a poem to determine 'immagin[i] illusori[e]', namely to produce other meanings than the literal one by the location of 'images'. Still, this can happen 'dove pure non noccia al restante del contesto', as it instead occurs in the case of Chiabrera's 'In morte di Orazio Zanchini'. Here, Leopardi underlines a singular effect of unforeseen ridiculousness: we can remark once more how Leopardi's inquiry is equally led into the intrinsic features of the text, as well as into the assumed effects to a hypothetic reader.

Ora il bel crin si frange, ~~e~~E sul tuo sasso piange. Si frange qui vuol dire si percuote, e intende il poeta, colle mani ec. Il senso è chiaro, e quel si frange non ha che far niente con sul tuo sasso, ~~ed è~~e n'è distinto quanto ~~p~~ meglio si può dire. Ma la collocazione casuale delle parole è tale, ch'io metto pegno che quanti leggono la Canz. del Chiabrera colla mente così sull'aspettare immagini, a prima giunta si figurano Firenze personificata (che di Firenze personificata parla il Chiabrera) che percuota la testa e si franga il crine sul sasso del

[275] Again, the use of the Greek expression *epipléttein* can be seen as proof that Leopardi was actually using Toup's bilingual edition.

Zanchini~~; ,~~; ~~La quale immag. non è decorosa che~~ quantunque i~~n~~mmediatamente poi venga aravvedersi [sic] e a comprendere senza fatica l'intenzione del poeta ch'è manifesta. (*Zib.* 26)

Analogously, 'voci', 'locuzioni' and 'costruzioni' should be 'ardite': on 5 May 1822, Leopardi will write that 'una lingua non è bella se non è ardita, e in ultima analisi troverete che in fatto di lingue, bellezza è lo stesso che ardire. (E che altro sarebb'ella? L'armonia ec. del suono delle parole?' (*Zib.* 2145). Leopardi is here extremely clear, in explaining how he refers to 'forme de' sentimenti' and not to feelings themselves (which would belong to the sphere of eloquence, cf. *Zib.* 24). Composing 'voci' and 'sentenze' is to move on an ambiguous hedge, by skilfully avoiding metaphors happening to be 'soverchiamente ardit[e]', as well as cacophonic plagiarisms from ancient languages, which would be the opposite of correct imitation. It is the case, for example, of Chiabrera's use of Greek composed words, like 'ondisonante ec. che la nostra lingua non ama' (*Zib.* 25). Linguistic borrowings from ancient languages should therefore be deduced with the same discretion applied in eloquence while avoiding affectation, and in the sublime while omitting those 'lunghe enumerazioni di cose di parti d'immagini accozzate […] senza rapidità d~~'~~i stile e freddam.' as blamed in Guidi (*Zib.* 27): what Leopardi proposes is a poignant care for details, a strong vigilance on the slightest aspects of poetic composition.

What happens, then, in this recognition? First of all, it leads Leopardi to a first sketch of canonisation. If eloquence belongs uniquely to Petrarch (and to Tasso), Leopardi's analysis circumscribes a specific school of poetry, the one defined as that 'de' Pindarici e Alcaici e Simonidei ed Oraziani, ossia Eroici e Morali principalmente': Chiabrera is the first and Testi is the second, considering that, 'se avessero avuto più studio e più fino gusto', the one could have been the Italian Pindar and the other the Italian Horace. Filicaia and Guidi are much more distant, and 'mi basta' – Leopardi writes – 'che tutti [e due] sieno gli ultimi e a gran

distanza degli altri due' (*Zib.* 28). We can also call this category that of 'sublime poets', implicitly opposed to another one that Leopardi has concurrently and quite unexpectedly encountered. If his research was directed towards an eloquent and sublime way of constructing a civil poetic style, the analysis of Zappi's and Manfredi's poetry brings him to the recognition that they belong to 'un'altra classe'. In particular, the discovery of Zappi[276] emerges as an alterity in Leopardi's research, which is immediately described as a happy surprise. Zappi's miniaturistic taste, as expressed in his love sonnets, allows Leopardi to go beyond the claimed judgement by Baretti, who had spoken of 'smascolinati sonettini, pargoletti piccinini, mollemente femminini, tutti pieni d'amorini'.[277]

Io ~~non~~ solea dire ch'era una follia il credere e scrivere che ci fosse oin [sic] italia [sic] o altrove qualche poeta che somigliasse ad Anacreonte. Ma leggendo il Zappi trovo in lui veramente i semi di un Anacreonte, e al tutto Anacreontica l'invenzione e in parte anche lo stile dei Sonetti 24.34.41, e dello scherzo: il Museo d'Amore. ~~Le altre~~ Anche le altre sue poesie sono lodevoli~~ss.~~ non poco per ~~le~~ novità d~~ie~~' pensieri (giacchè non c'è quasi componimento suo dove non si veda qualche lampo di bella novità) con dignitoso garbo e composta vivacità e certa leggiadria propria di lui […] per lea qual~~ie~~ ~~doti~~ si può chiamare originale, benche [sic] di piccola originalità. I Sonetti Amorosi ~~più come~~ ed hanno le doti sopraddette, e qual più ~~e~~ qual meno s'accostano all'Anacreontico. *Zib.* (28)

A few pages later, Leopardi will follow again such an Anacreontic impression:

Io 1. per esprimere l'effetto ~~che~~ indefinibile che fanno in noi le odi di Anacreonte non so trovare similitudine ed esempio più adattato di un alito passeggero di venticello fresco nell'estate odorifero e ricreante, che tutto in un momento vi ristora in certo modo e v'apre come il respiro e il cuore con una certa allegria, ma prima che voi possiate appagarvi pienamente di quel piacere, ovvero analizzarne la qualità, e distinguere perchè vi sentiate così refrigerato già quello spiro è passato, conforme appunto avviene in Anacreonte, che e quella sensazione indefinibile è quasi istantanea, e se volete analizzarla vi sfugge, non la sentite più,

[276] Manfredi is instead said to possess only 'gentilezza', which is 'diversa dalla grazia e leggiadria e venustà, ch'è cosa più interiore ~~e profonda~~ intima nel componimento e indefinibile' (*Zib.* 28).

[277] Quoted in Alessandro D'Ancona and Orazio Bacci, *Manuale della letteratura italiana* (Florence: Barbèra, 1906), p. 369.

tornate a leggere, vi restano in mano le parole sole~~, e qu~~ e secche, quell'ari~~a~~etta per così dire, è fuggita, e appena vi potete ricordare in confuso la sensazione che v'hanno prodotta un momento fa quelle stesse parole che avete sotto gli occhi. Questa sensazione mi è parso di sentirla, leggendo (oltre Anacreonte) il solo Zappi. (*Zib.* 30-31)

If the approaching between Anacreon and Zappi may sound excessive, this is because Leopardi, while speaking of Zappi, is actually defining the first core of a theory of poetry connected to the fleetingness of time and to a peculiarly ungraspable kind of feeling. In other words, if the canonisation of eloquence and the sublime undertaken through a quick survey of the Italian literary tradition has provided the theoretical instruments for the composition of the two patriotic songs, Zappi's Anacreontic style leads Leopardi to another definition of poetry, that of a skillfull simplicity that he had already evoked while answering Breme ('quella semplicità […] di Anacreonte che pare il non plus ultra, e vedete ~~che~~ se vi pare che si possa pur chiamare semplicità', *Zib.* 20) and later eloquently described as an 'aura odorifera'.

questa sensazione lascia gran desiderio e scontentezza, e si vorrebbe richiamarla e non si può; così la lettura di Anacreonte; la quale lascia desiderosissimi, ma rinnovando la lettura, come per perfezionare il piacere (ch'egli par veramente bisognoso d'esser perfezionato, anche più che ispirar desiderio d'esser continuato), niun piacere si prova, anzi non si vede nè c~~o~~he cosa l'abbia prodotto da principio, nè che ragion ve ne possa essere, nè in che cosa esso sia consistito; e più si cerca, più s'esamina, più s'approfonda, men si trova e si scopre, anzi si perde di vista non pur la causa, ma la qualità stessa del piacer provato, chè volendo rimembrarlo, la memoria si confonde; e in somma pensando e cercando, sempre più si diviene incapac~~e~~i di provar piacere alcuno di quelle odi, e risentirne quell'effetto che s~~'~~e n'è sentito; ed esse sempre più divengono quasi stoppa e s'inaridiscono e istecchiscono fra le mani che le tastano e palpano p. ispecularle. (*Zib.* 3441-42, 16 September 1823)

In calling the 'indefinable' pleasure caused by Anacreon an 'aura', Leopardi drafts here in the first analysis an effect of poetry grounded in a fleeting uncertainty that cannot be framed (and certainly not systematised) within the alchemies of the sublime retraced in the treatise on the *Sublime*. If the overview on the Italian poetic canon has then led Leopardi to situate poetry in an undetermined measure between pathos and Kitsch, as well as between 'ardire' and

overabundance, the Anacreontic echoes of Zappi's poetry bring Leopardi to acknowledge an excess of a certain poetic language, which is impossible to reduce into rule. Maybe not by chance, once his recognition of the Italian lyrical poetry was finished, Leopardi sketches in a page of the *Zibaldone* some 'Canzonette popolari che si cantavano al mio tempo a Recanati' (December 1818): the lightness of popular songs defines a different perspective from that of the sublime, prospecting another way of making poetry (that we can easily call 'idyllic') grounded in an elaborated simplicity, and on a naiveté that is precisely recuperated through the acknowledgment of a (personal and cultural) loss of innocence. The reading of the *Essai sur le Goût*, and of the chapter significantly titled 'Du je ne sais quoi', takes place precisely in the very middle of such reflection.

3.c. Entering a long-extinguished debate

In the long fragment written at the beginning of August 1820 (*Zib.* 198-203, 4-9 August), when first approaching Montesquieu's notion of 'je ne sais quoi', Leopardi immediately frames the concept within well-known categories. He first states a substantial identification of Montesquieu's 'je ne sais quoi' with the notion of grace; in parallel, aesthetic grace is assimilated to the theological one ('the 'materia della grazia […] nella teoria delle arti' is 'astrusa […] come quella della grazia divina nella teologia', *Zib.* 198). Leopardi had already used the notion of grace in the course of his overview of Italian lyrical tradition and in the 'sistema di belle arti'.[278] In *Zib.* 13-14, he had applied the notion to Monti's poetry, applying the aesthetic and visual notion of 'grace' to the 'images' generated by rhetorical devices

[278] One of the sources could be Borsieri's review of Martignoni's essay *Del Bello e del Sublime*, quoted by Leopardi already on p. 7 of the *Zibaldone*. See Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, p. 374 and the respective footnote.

('bellezza novità efficacia delle imagini', 'mollezza e dirò così sveltezza, agilità, disinvoltura dell'espressione'; 'gran felicità nell'esprimere cose e imagini difficilissime', 'disinvolta e spedita nobiltà dello stile', 'scelta e collocamenteo delle parole […] ~~co~~a cose e imagini per se stesse ignobili o quasi', 'sublimità e grandezza delle imaginazioni fantastiche' and 'facilità e felicità di certe rime disparatissime'.[279] Although still ambiguously included within the vocabulary of the sublime, 'grazia' is connected from the beginning with levity and lightness, marked by aristocratic easiness and by a discreet elegance: in *Zib.* 28, Leopardi inserts grace within an ideal triad together with 'leggiadria e venustà', and in *Zib.* 43 he recalls the Greek notion of *Charis*, asserting the unavoidable connection between grace and a sort of popular naiveté:

> Proprietà, efficacia, ricchezza, varietà, disinvoltura, eleganza ancora e morbidezza e facilità, e soavità e mollezza e fluidità ec. sono cose diverse ~~da~~ e possono stare senza la *cháris attiké*, lepos atticum, quella grazia che non si potrà mai trarre se non da un dialetto popolare (capace di somministrarla) che gli ~~l~~antichi greci traevano dall'Attico i latini massimam. antichi come Plauto Terenz. ec. dal puro e volgare e nativo Romano, e noi possiamo e dobbiamo derivare dal Toscano usato ~~da~~ giudiziosamente.

Most of all, 'grazia' is already conceived as implicitly opposed to technical and denotative language, namely – as we have seen – to the peculiarities of French. What strikes Leopardi, thereby affecting his reception of Montesquieu's theories, is the insistence of French poetics on grace, which is surprising since French is, from his perspective, the most intrinsically ungracious language:

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[279] The same connection to visuality, inserted in the semantic area of lightness and easiness, is in *Zib.* 36: 'Nel Monti è pregiabilissima e si può dire originale e sua propria la volubilità armonia mollezza cedevolezza eleganza dignità graziosa, o dignitosa grazia del verso, e tutte queste proprietà parimente nelle immagini, alle quali aggiungete scelta felice, evidenza, scolpitezza ec. E dico tutte giacchè anche le sue immagini hanno un certo che di volubile molle pieghevole facile ec.'.

La grazia non può venire altro che dalla natura, e la natura non ista [sic] mai secondo il compasso della gramatica della geometria dell'analisi della matematica ec. Quindi la scarsezza di grazia nella lingua francese tutta analitica e tecnica e regolare, e diremo angolare, massima scarsezza nell'esteriore dello stile, e poi anche nell'interiore ec. se bene se ne compensano col nominar la grazia. Volte per pagina, e non c'è un libro francese dove non troviate a ogni occhiata grace, grace massime parlando dei libri della ~~x~~loro nazione, encomiandoli ec. ~~g~~Grace grace, mi viene allora in bocca, et non erat grace (pax pax et non erat pax […]). (*Zib.* 46-47)[280]

When Leopardi approaches Montesquieu's text, he therefore implicitly considers 'je ne sais quoi', from the beginning, as a plain synonym for 'grace'; in the same way, aesthetic grace is basically shown as at least comparable, if not fully identifiable, with the theological one.[281] Now, such connection was by no means new, considering that at least since the Renaissance '*grazia* e *non so che* sono spesso evocati assieme, l'uno a spiegare l'altra, tanto

[280] The argumentation is more closely developed in the following pages, discussing the problem of linguistic borrowings from ancient Greek: 'le parole greche essendo necessariam.di quel sembiante che ~~noi~~ ~~tutti~~ siamo soliti di vedere nelle usate dagli scienziati, danno alla lingua francese (e darebbero a qualunq. lingua e daranno all'italiana se dalla franc. saranno trasportate stabilm. nella nostra) un'aria indegna di tecnicismo (per usare una di queste belle parole) e di geometrico e di matemat. e di scientif. che ~~la~~ ischele~~s~~trisce la lingua, riducendola in certo modo ad angoli e perchè non c'è cosa più nemica della natura ~~qu~~ ~~della~~ che l'arida geometria, le toglie tutta la naturalezza e la naïveté, e la popolarità (onde nasce la bellezza) e la grazia e la venustà, e proprietà, ed anche la forza e robustezza ed efficacia mancando anche questa assolutamente al linguaggio tecni~~x~~co che non fa forza col linguaggio, ma con quello che risulta dalle parole cioè col significato loro e coll'argomento e ragione, o col concetto spiegato freddamente con esse' (*Zib.* 48). See also: 'La grazia appena io credo che possa esser concepita dai francesi con idea vera. Certo i loro scrittori non ~~las~~ la conoscono. Lo confessa pienamente Thomas Essai sur les Éloges ch.9. Infatti manca loro cette sensibilité tendre et pure, cioè inaffettata ~~o~~e naturale (l'avrebbero per natura, ma la società non vuole che la conservino: l'avevano i loro antichi~~s~~ scrittori) ~~et~~ e cet instrument facile et souple vale a dire una lingua come la greca e l'italiana' (*Zib.*208, 13 August 1820); 'Tutto quello che ho detto in parecchi luoghi dell'affettazione dei francesi, della loro impossibilità di esser graziosi ec. bisogna intenderlo relativamente alle idee che le altre nazioni o tutte o in parte, o riguardo al genere, o solamente ad alcune particolarità, hanno dell'affettazione grazia ec. perchè riflette molto bene Morgan France l.3. t.1 p.257. Il faut pourtant accorder beaucoup à la différence des manières nationales; et celles de la femme françoise la plus amie du naturel doivent porter avec elle ce qu'un Anglois, d~~e~~ans le premier moment, jugera une teinte d'affectation, jusqu'à ce que l'expérience en fasse mieux juger' (*Zib.*236, 9 September 1820).

[281] See Martino Rossi Monti, *Il cielo in terra. La grazia fra teologia ed estetica* (Turin: UTET, 2008).

che vengono a costituire, fin da quando si comincia a usare l'espressione *je ne sais quoi*, una sorta di endiadi'.[282] Still, for Leopardi, it is unavoidably connected with stylistic aspects, becoming by itself the ground of a confrontation which is not much aesthetical, but rather literary.

Leopardi enters the debate on 'je ne sais quoi' far beyond its chronological boundaries. Historically speaking, that on 'je ne sais quoi' is a *quérelle* taking place between the end of the seventeenth century (the first work entirely devoted to the subject is the fifth of Bouhours's *Entretiens d'Ariste et d'Eugène*, of 1671) and precisely the *Essai sur le Goût*, where the bases of 'je ne sais quoi' are retraced in surprise and unpredictability.[283] It presupposes a prehistory, by the way not neglected by its theorists, who willingly antedate the concept to Petrarch and even to Dante, and, far before, to the Greek notion of *Charis* and the Latin one of *gratia*; it implies an afterlife, from the Romantics' 'ineffable' to the full philosophical experience of the twentieth century, as in Vladimir Jankélévitch, in whose work 'je ne sais quoi' becomes the key to meditate 'sull'occasione e il tempo, sull'apparenza e l'essenza, sul malinteso, sulla morte, sul volere e la libertà'.[284] Still, as Stefano Velotti writes, around the second half of the eighteenth century – so, basically, after the *Essai sur le Goût* –

> il *non so che* torna a dissiparsi nel linguaggio commune o letterario. Come una locuzione tra le altre […] era in circolazione da secoli, ma solo tra il Seicento e il Settecento diviene il nome di un problema a cui si intitolano dialoghi, apologhi e brevi trattati. Man mano che il Settecento volge alla fine, il *non so che* torna ad alleggerirsi del suo carico di domande, significati e implicazioni, per rientrare progressivamente nell'anonimato, o in una sorta di latenza.[285]

[282] Paolo D'Angelo and Stefano Velotti, *Il 'non so che'. Storia di un'idea estetica* (Palermo: Aesthetica, 1997), p. 23.
[283] For a historical analysis of the notion of 'je ne sais quoi', cf. Richard Scholar, *The 'Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi' in Early Modern Europe. Encounters with a Certain Something* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).
[284] D'Angelo, Velotti, *Il 'non so che'*, p. 59.
[285] Ibid., p. 58.

At first glance, Leopardi's operation appears then at least out of time, actually entering a debate extinguished at least seventy years, and, the more, proposing an equation which was already present in Renaissance texts as those of Dolce, Varchi and Firenzuola (which were not present, it has to be said, in the Recanati library).[286]

Still, the notion of 'je ne sais quoi' could evoke, in Leopardi, more subtle and intimate connections. If Leopardi could have read Bouhours, he would have probably been delighted by the assertion that the origin of 'je ne sais quoi' couldn't be but a fully Italian invention. In the *Entretiens*, Bouhours had mainly quoted Tasso, an author read by Leopardi at least since 1817, and – from the beginning of the *Zibaldone* – one of the cornerstones of his reflections on poetry; the expression 'non so che' is widely disseminated in Tasso's texts, arguably constituting the source of its occurrence in Leopardi's earlier writings.[287] The already mentioned acknowledgment of Tasso's primacy in eloquence, of his exemplary biography[288] and of the tragic and philosophical power of his poetry,[289] goes along with the singular re-emergence of memories of Tasso in crucial moments of Leopardi's own poetry, precisely connected with ineffableness and ambiguity of feeling. One example is the expression 'mi sovvien' at the eleventh line of 'L'infinito' (1819); a few months before, Leopardi had quite

[286] I frankly do not understand how the presence in Leopardi's library of Firenzuola's *Rime* and *De' ragionamenti, alla illustrissima contessa di Camerino* could legitimate the superimposition on Leopardi's thought of the reflections on 'je ne sais quoi' made by Firenzuola in the *Discorsi sulla bellezza delle donne*, that Leopardi did not know: see Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, p. 379n.
[287] For an inquiry into other possible sources cf. ibid., pp. 387-91.
[288] 'Chiunque conosce intimamente il Tasso, se non riporrà lo scrittore o il poeta fra i sommi, porrà certo l'uomo fra i primi, e forse nel primo luogo del suo tempo' (*Zib.* 462, 28 December 1820).
[289] Cf 'Ad Angelo Mai' (January 1820), ll. 121-35.

pleonastically noted, in the *Zibaldone*, the peculiar use of such an expression in Tasso, indicating a sort of sudden philosophical speculation.[290]

Besides, 'je ne sais quoi' must unavoidably touch the core itself of Leopardi's aesthetical theorisation, in showing close proximities to his analysis of 'vague' and 'indefinite' effects in poetry. In analyzing Chiabrera's poetic style in 1818, 'vago' is used two times, coupling with the adjective 'incerto' (*Zib.* 26); speaking of Horace, one year later, it is connected to the 'irragionevole, che tanto è necessario al poeta' (*Zib.* 61), in *Zib.* 80 it couples with 'infinito' ('il vago e l'infinito del sentimento') and, in January 1820, with 'indeterminato' ('vago e indeterminato', *Zib.* 100, 8 January). The definitive couple 'vago e indefinito' occurs for the first time in the course of the analysis on the *Essai sur le Goût* (*Zib.* 170, 12-23 July 1820). Now, the adjectives 'incerto', 'irragionevole', 'infinito', 'indeterminato' and 'indefinito' share a structural common element: they are all grounded on the negation of a positive term, exactly as the expression 'je ne sais quoi'. Already blamed in the eighteenth century as the ultimate resource for supplying a lack of critical vocabulary (but all these remarks, Paolo D'Angelo notes, were nothing but variations on Bouhours's statement of 'je ne sais quoi' as 'l'asyle de l'ignorance', to which one recurs 'quand on ne sçait plus que dire'),[291] 'je ne sais quoi' employs negation as the mark of an excess, as the only possible way to define the unavoidable swerve from the sum of actual elements and its overabundant result. From this perspective, negation (which will become one of the key topics of twentieth-century thought, from Frege to Freud) becomes the rhetorical device through which a dark zone of knowledge is conveyed,

[290] 'Dice Bacone da Verulamio che tutte le facoltà ridotte ad arte steriliscono. Della quale verissima sentenza farò un breve commenteo applicandolo in particolare alla poesia. Steriliscono le ~~arti~~ facoltà ridotte ad arte, vale adire [sic] gli uomini non trovano altro che le amplifichi, come trovavano ~~pr~~ quando ell'erano ancora informi e senza nome e senza leggi proprie ec. e di ciò mi sovvengono (verbo usato in questo significato dal Tasso) 4. ragioni.' (*Zib.* 39, 1818).

[291] D'Angelo, Velotti, *Il 'non so che'*, p. 10.

a space which – as the definition implicitly admits – remains untold and undefined. With the same aim it appears in Leopardi's own poetry. As Luigi Blasucci highlights, 'L'Infinito' (1819) and 'Alla sua Donna' (1823) share a common structure, which is precisely that of negation: the later poem is grounded in a set of 'premesse in negativo', through which Leopardi pursues 'la rivendicazione del diritto di coltivare l'inganno in quanto tale, di risarcire entro la propria immaginazione i guasti prodotti dalla cognizione del vero. Ma è, a ben guardare, la logica stessa dell'"io nel pensier mi fingo" che presiede all'illusione dell'infinito nella lirica del '19'.[292] As Blasucci summarises, 'la donna ideale diventa […] l'equivalente degli "interminati spazi" […]; lontananza e assenza […] adempiono, come la siepe, l'ufficio di stimolare il lavoro dell'immaginazione'.[293] Negation, which 'penetra grammaticalmente nella stessa evocazione del fantasma celeste', literally constructs the poem of 1823, giving birth to a theory of love tended between the apophatic dimension of neoplationic conceptions of love and post-Enlightenment irony.[294] More than the presence of Plato as a philosopher of love, however, the song 'Alla sua Donna' shows the traces of another Platonic dialogue, that Leopardi not by chance reads in the very summer of 1823 that precedes the composition of the song: in the *Sophist*, the problem posed is precisely that of negation and of the ontological status of not-being, so that, as the 'foreigner' summarises, 'When we say not-being, we speak, I think, not of something that is the opposite of being, but only of something different' (*all'héteron mónon*).[295] This 'something different' is precisely

[292] Luigi Blasucci, 'Petrarchismo e platonismo nella canzone "Alla sua Donna"', in id., *I tempi dei 'Canti*', pp. 62-80, p. 66.
[293] Ibid., pp. 66-67.
[294] Ibid., p. 70. See pp. 70-71 for a recognition of the grammatical structure of negation in 'Alla sua Donna'.
[295] *Sophist*, 257b. Leopardi testitifes having read the *Sophist* in the fourth 'elenco di letture' in *TPP*, p. 1115. Plato's discussion of negation in the *Sophist* has not been connected, as far as I know, neither to 'Alla sua Donna' nor to the wider problem of structures of negation in Leopardi's work, not even in Massimo Natale's detailed recognition of Plato's presence in

the ultimate core of ambiguity in which the poetic effect is grounded, and of which Leopardi looks for the alchemic composition.

Montesquieu's hypothesis was that grace is grounded in surprise. Moreover, grace somehow belongs to naturalness (*naturalezza*) and naiveté, which, in cultivated times, can easily look surprising and wonderful.[296] Both statements were surely not without echoes in Leopardi's own poetics. For what concerns the imitation of nature, Leopardi notes that 'ci sono anche delle cose non naturali, che pur sono graziose; o vero naturali, ma ~~non~~ graziose non per questo che sono naturali' (*Zib.* 199): Leopardi recalls here explicitly the aesthetics of imperfection already delineated in 1817, equally asserting – and with the same examples – the relative nature of grace, as that of beauty.

> Il grazioso è relativo come il bello, cioè ad uno sì, a un altro no ec. L'esperienza lo mostra, che come non c'è tipo della bellezza, così neanche della grazia. E quantunque paia che l'idea della naturalezza debba essere universale, tuttavia non è, e presso noi passano per naturali infinite cose che sono tutt'altro, e ai villani parranno naturali e graziose cento maniere che a noi parranno grossolane ec. Così secondo le diverse nazioni costumi abitudini ~~ec.~~ opinioni ec. Non che la natura non abbia le sue maniere proprie, certe e determinate, ma succede qui come nel bello. Un cavallo scodato, un cane colle orecchie tagliate, è contro natura, una donna coi pendenti infilzati nelle orecchie, un uomo colla barba tagliata ec. eppur piacciono. ~~VI.~~ Molto più discordano i gusti intorno alla grazia indipendente dalla naturalezza. (*Zib.* 201-02)
>
> Cavalli scodati. Cani colle orecchie tagliate. Opinione e senso de' nostri contadini circa la bellezza, e vedi quelle descritte nella *Beca e* nella *Nencia* non già da scherzo, ma perchè di quella sorta piacciono ai villani. […] Il bello ideale non è altro che l'idea della convenienza ~~al~~ che un artista si forma secondo le opinioni e gli usi del suo tempo, e della sua nazione. Barba, e capelli tagliati o no. (*Zib.* 8-9)

As far as Montesquieu's notion of surprise is concerned, in *Zib.* 189 Leopardi had already connected it with the 'teoria della noia esposta di sopra in questi pensieri', namely with the

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Leopardi, *Il canto delle idee: Leopardi fra 'Pensiero dominante' e 'Aspasia'* (Venice: Marsilio, 2009).

[296] 'siccome la natura […] è ora più difficile a seguire, e più rara assai che l'arte, così notate che ~~anche~~ quelle grazie che consistono in pura naturalezza, non si danno ordinariamente senza sorpresa' (*Zib.* 199).

basic notion of the 'sistema di belle Arti'. Still, those reflections rather suggested to connect surprise with the sublime, while grace had subtler and more intimate causes. Actually, Leopardi notes, the effect of grace is not 'di sublimar l'anima, o di riempierla, o di renderla attonita come fa la bellezza, ma di scuoterla', thereby producing 'appoco appoco […] nell'anima una commozione e un incendio vastissimo, ma non tutto a un colpo' (*Zib.* 198). The verb 'sublimare' and the expression 'tutto a un colpo' implicitly oppose grace to the poetic sublime, 'format[o] rapidamente dalla scelta *tōn akron lēmmátōn*, come dice Longino, come fa Pindaro e Omero e il Chiabrera, con che v[iene] a *epiplēttein* il Lettore e te lo strascin[a] e sbalz[a] qua e là stordito e confuso a voglia [sua]' (*Zib.* 27). Beauty (like the sublime) is a sudden impression, 'che si mostra tutta a un tratto, e non ha successione di parti', and whose effect 'si compie tutto in un attimo, e all'anima dopo che s'è appagata di quella vista non rimane altro da desiderare nè dàa sperare' (198). On the contrary, grace 'ordinariamente consiste nel movimento': 'e diremo così,' he concludes, 'la bellezza è nell'istante, e la grazia nel tempo', implying by the notion of 'movement' 'anche tutto quello che spetta alla parola'. In other words, Leopardi extrapolates from Montesquieu's text what Jankélévitch calls 'le paradoxe plotinien', distinguishing 'les traits qui sont l'élément statique, graphique ou plastique de la morphologie' and 'les manières qui sont toujours cinétiques et toujours naissantes'.[297] In parallel, the potential application of Montesquieu's 'je ne sais quoi' to poetry is definitely implied within this definition: unlike Lessing, who identified staticity as the domain of visual arts, while movement was assigned to poetry, Leopardi's opposition between staticity and motion articulates the difference between beauty/sublime and grace, thus opening the analysis both to 'Belle Arti' and poetry. 'Movement' and 'time' delineate a specific constellation of grace, as a fleeting and light moment of aesthetic enjoyment whose

[297] Vladimir Jankélévitch, *Le Je-ne-sais-quoi et le presque rien*, 3 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 1980), vol. I, p. 92.

root is, besides, not difficult to individuate in the 'sensazione indefinibile' evoked with respect to Anacreon.[298]

Leopardi's attempt at defining grace meets, however, at this stage, a symptomatic failure. Grace, he acknowledges, is made of simplicity ('Spessissimo la semplicità è fonte, o proprietà della grazia'), but the proposition cannot be reversed; it is often inspired by action and movement, but there are several cases in which it is not It is not uniquely made of naiveté, 'e pure non c'è grazia, dove c'è affettazione', and grace is therefore rather a skilfully obtained simplicity, because, 'quantunque una cosa non sia graziosa per questo ch'è naturale, tuttavia non può esser graziosa se non è, o non par naturale, e il minimo segno di stento, o di volontà, ec. ec. basta per ispegnere ogni grazia' (which is the same artificiality blamed on Eighteenth century poetry). Common experience, Leopardi notes, confirms how grace is usually connected to smallness,[299] as well as to swiftness and lightness:[300] its effect is 'di scuotere e

[298] Gaetano (*Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, p. 376) approaches Leopardi to late eighteenth-century German artistic theorisations, such as Lessing's, Goethe's and Moses Mendelssohn's, which could have been mediated by Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne*. My hypothesis is that Leopardi's connection between grace and movement somehow anticipates Aby Warburg's aesthetics, as we will see in the last section.

[299] 'è cosa ordinaria di chiamar graziosa una persona piccola, e spesso in maniera come se la piccolezza fosse sinonimo di grazia' (*Zib.* 200). See also: 'Una prova evidente e popolare, frequente nella vita, e giornaliera, che il piccolo è considerato come grazioso, si è il vezzo dei diminutivi che si sogliono applicare alle persone o cose che si amano, o si vogliono vezzeggiare, pregare, addolcire, descrivere come graziose ec. E così al contrario volendo mettere in ridicolo qualche persona o cosa tutt'altro che graziosa, se le applica il diminutivo perchè la renda ridicola colla forza del contrasto. Quest'uso è così antico (nel latino, greco ec.) e così universale oggidì che si può considerare come originato dalla natura, e non dal costume o dalla proprietà di questa o quella lingua' (*Zib.* 250-51, 22 September 1820); 'Siccome il piccolo è grazioso, così il grande per se stesso, sotto ogni aspetto, (anche il grande però è relativo) è contrario alla grazia. E mal sarebbe accolto quel poeta che personificando p.e. un monte gli attribuisse qualità o sensi dilicati ec. o che attribuisse della grandezza a qualunque soggetto da lui descritto o trattato come grazioso o delicato; o che introducesse la grandezza qualunque, in un genere o argomento grazioso ec. se ciò non fosse per un contrasto. Eppure astrattamente parlando non c'è ragione perchè il grande non possa esser grazioso, e quello ch'è grande per noi, è ~~p~~ o può esser piccolo per altri ec. ec.' (*Zib.* 1920, 14 October 1821); 'I diminutivi sogliono esser sempre graziosi, e recar grazia e leggiadria ed eleganza al discorso,

solleticare e pungere', so that it is even possible to distinguish between two kinds of grace, 'l'una piccante, l'altra molle, insinuante, glissante dolcemente nell'anima'. In all cases, however, the risk is to be caught in the trap of confounding effects with causes: grace cannot be defined if not by means of negation, in the same way as the pleasure engendered by Anacreon was such precisely because of its fleetingness, definable only by the negative acknowledgment of its absence after its passing over. In the same way, the attempt of circumscribing the notion of grace leads to the acknowledgment that 'la definizione della grazia non si può dare, e Montesquieu non l'ha data, benchè paia crederlo, e bisogna sempre ricorrere al non so che' (*Zib.* 200): at this stage, hence, Leopardi's analysis of the *Essai sur le Goût* ultimately arrives to the not renounceable function of negation.

The elaboration of the notion of grace, however, systematically continues within the *Zibaldone,* as to remark the absolute necessity of such a definition in Leopardi's aesthetics. Leopardi often come back to the notion of grace, and – on 9 October 1821 – he will speak for the first time of '[la] mia teoria della grazia' (*Zib.* 1880). It is precisely on the development leading to such a definition that the next chapter will focus on.

3.d. Theory of grace

At the end of the long note of 4-9 August, Leopardi had already hypothesised that 'la grazia consiste in un certo irritamento nelle cose che appartengono al bello~~.~~ e al piacere' (*Zib.* 203). 'Irritamento' was an extremely poignant word, but the reflection hadn't been developed.

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alla frase ec. Riferite quest'osservazione alla grazia che nasce dalla piccolezza' (*Zib.* 2304, 29 December 1821).

[300] 'L'~~o~~ ~~effetto~~ svelto, il leggero, parimente ha che far colla grazia' (*Zib.* 202).

Still, the day after, Leopardi notes in the *Zibaldone* two quick passages which have apparently nothing to do with Montesquieu's theory:

Oste albergatore, ed anche ospite, ossia albergato, appresso gli antichi italiani. […] Hostis aveva appunto questa seconda significazione appresso gli antichi latini. […] E forse hostis avrà avuto anche il significato di albergatore, come oste oggidì, ~~h~~ e come hospes ed ospite in latino ed in italiano hanno lo stesso doppio senso di albergatore e albergato.

Straniero ossia ospite si prendeva per nemico anche nell'antica lingua celtica. […] E così appoco appoco si sarà cambiato il significato di hostis, cioè considerando lo straniero come nemico. (*Zib.* 205-06, 10 August 1820)

The double signification of the Latin word (reverberated in its later Italian derivation) highlights a tension embodied within its etymological history, which determines its oscillation in meaning. It would certainly be unworthy mentioning such philological analysis, if a certain synonym for 'straniero' – 'pellegrino' – would not be later used by Leopardi in order to explain a certain source of aesthetical fascination. I will return to the 'pellegrino' later: now, we can just remark how this note is followed by an interesting perfecting of Leopardi's analysis on grace.

La grazia propriamente non ha luogo se non nei piaceri che appartengono al bello. Una novità, un racconto curioso~~ti~~, una nuova piccante, tutto quello che punge o muove o solletica la curiosità, sono irritamenti piacevoli ma non hanno che far colla grazia. E quelli che appartengono ai cibi, o a qualunque altro piacere parimente, somigliano alla grazia, e possono esserne esempi, ma non confondersi con lei. Perciò la grazia va definita semplicemente, un irritamento nelle cose che appartengono al bello, tanto sensibile, quanto intelle~~x~~ttuale, come il bello poetico ec. (*Zib.* 206)

Leopardi is here fully recuperating the idea that he had quickly sketched the day before, but entirely focusing on beauty: grace is not beauty, he writes, but 'ha luogo […] nei piaceri che appartengono al bello', and dissection of grace can be given only by a close analysis of beauty. Other forms of pleasure (curiosity, the piquant, sensual satisfaction) are therefore

excluded. Grace is uniquely 'un irritamento nelle cose che appartengono al bello': an extraneous element, a troubling and 'irritating' something that contaminates the fixedness of beauty, however, by giving it a 'je ne sais quoi' that beauty does not possess on its own. It is at least curious that Leopardi sketches such reflection after having stated the ambiguity of the notion of 'foreignness'. In its original meaning, *hostis* merely designated the 'other', but had quickly turned into a negative acceptation, thus denoting a troubling and 'irritating' presence within the perimeter of familiarity (Freud, who wrote an article on the opposite meanings in ancient words, would have presumably made interesting consideration on such a notion as *hostis*, indicating both landlord and enemy). Now, if classical beauty is a form of familiarity, defined as it is by the well-accepted paradigms of *proportio*, *venustas* and *claritas* ('ordine', 'regola', 'armonia', 'convenienza', *Zib.* 1326, 14 July 1821), grace emerges as a haunting presence, which stimulated an undefinable feeling that is obliquely situated between pleasure and trouble, and requires therefore a particularly refined sensibility in order to be acknowledged and experienced:

> L'irritamento della grazia è piacevole come un irritamento corporale nel gusto nel tatto, ec. E come una maggiore irritabilità ~~delle~~ e dilicatezza del palato, fibre ec. rende più suscettibili ~~degl~~ e di più fino discernimento rispetto a questi irritamenti corporali, così nella grazia riguardo allo spirito. V. se vuoi Montesquieu l. più volte cit. ~~del~~ De la délicatesse. (*Zib.* 212-13, 17 August 1820)

Such reflection definitely situates grace in the domain of subjectivity, in the very same way as beauty: that of grace, as that of beauty, is besides a fully relative concept. This can equally apply to aesthetical[301] and to literary grace;[302] it is even connected with one's own individual

[301] 'Alle volte la vivacità (sia del viso, o dei movimenti, o ~~o~~ delle azioni ec.), alle volte la languidezza e flemma è madre di grazia. E chi è preso più da quella, chi più da questa' (*Zib.* 257, 3 October 1820).

memory, so that (Leopardi uses here as an eloquent example his own recollections about the name 'Teresa'),

> ordinariamente l'idea che noi abbiamo dell'eleganza, grazia, dolcezza, amabilità di un nome, non deriva dal suono materiale di esso nome, nè dalle sue qualità proprie e assolute, ma da quelle delle prime persone chiamate con quel nome, conosciute o trattate da noi nella prima età. (*Zib.* 483, 10 January 1821)

The relative notion of grace also involves a strongly historical perspective: the borderline dividing grace from affectation, as well as grace from beauty, can also be seen in the fracture dividing 'art' and 'nature', innocence and experience. The first embryo of such reflection is to be found in a note of 14-17 September 1820. If the universality of a language, writes Leopardi, derives 'dalla regolarità geometrica e facilità della sua struttura, dall'esattezza, chiarezza materiale, precisione, certezza de' suoi significati', such characteristics, in being grounded in reason and common sense, have nothing to do with 'bellezza, ricchezza […], dignità, varietà, armonia, grazia, forza, evidenza'. '[A]nzi', Leopardi specifies, 'la ricchezza confonde, difficulta, e pregiudica': it is a certain something that troubles the language's regularity by an 'abbondanza d'idiotismi, figure, insomma irregolarità' which are intrinsically 'necessarie alla bellezza e al piacere' (*Zib.* 243). The equation is fully stated in a note of the following October:

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[302] Cf. for example: 'Le grazie della lingua sono più che mai relative a quelle persone che la intendono perfettamente ec. e non mai assolute. Così le grazie attiche, toscane ec. forse più graziose per gli altri ~~a~~italiani che per gli stessi toscani, a cagione di una certa sorpresa ec. ma poco o nulla agli stranieri' (*Zib.* 207, 11 August 1820); 'Anche l'affettaz. è relativa, e la tal cosa parrà affettaz. in un paese e in un altro no, in una lingua e in un [sic]m altra no, o maggiore in questa e minore in quella, dipendendo dalle abitudini, opinioni ec. L'espressione del sentimentale conveniente in francia sarà affettata per noi, quella conveniente per noi, sarebbe parsa affettaz. agli antichi. La grazia francese affettata per noi, non lo sar per loro. Tuttavia è certo che la naturalezza ha u non so che di determinato e di comune, e che si fa conoscer e gustare da chicchessia, ma com'ella si conosce quando si trova, così le assuefaz. ec. impediscono spessissimo di essere <u>choqués</u> della sua mancanza, e di avvedercene' (*Zib.* 237, 10 September 1820).

La semplice bellezza rispetto alla grazia ec. è nella categoria del bello, quello ch'è la ragione rispetto alla natura nel sistema delle cose umane. Questa considerazione può applicarsi a spiegare l'arcana natura e gli effetti della grazia. (*Zib.* 270, 11 October 1820)

Such 'arcane nature' is the impalpable otherness that generates grace: Leopardi's theory stems precisely from the acnowledgment that grace is grounded in beauty, but as an element that imperceptibly troubles its regularity (a notion lated defined as 'extraordinary' or – in relation to poetry – 'pellegrino'). On 22 December 1820, Leopardi states for the first time how 'lo straordinario è fonte di grazia' (*Zib.* 452-53); in July 1821, he will definitely state that 'la grazia deriva bene spesso (e forse sempre) dallo straordinario nel bello, e da uno straordinario che non distrugga il bello' (*Zib.* 1322). Ultimately – in a conclusive note drafted in Florence in 1828 – he will conclude that grace 'per lo più non è altro che il brutto nel bello. Il brutto nel brutto, e il bello puro, sono ~~m~~ medesimam. alieni dalla grazia' (*Zib.* 4416, 25 October). In any case, the effect of grace is grounded in suprise, not in the sense described by Montesquieu, but rather as the sudden acknowledgment of an unfamiliar presence in the familiar regularity of beauty. Grace is a form of irregularity that does not, however, destroy the impression of beauty, but rather provides it with 'a certain something':

ci dà maggior sorpresa e piacere il veder che quello straordinario non nuoce al bello, non distrugge il conveniente e il regolare, nel mentre che è pure straordinario, e per se stesso irregolare; nel mentre che per essere irregolare e straordinario, dà risalto a quella bellezza e convenienza~~;~~: e insomma il vedere una bellezza e una convenienza non ordinaria, e di cose che non paiono poter convenire; una bellezza e convenienza diversa dalle altre e comuni. (*Zib.* 1322)

The same happens with poetic language: here, the reflection on grace is inextricably interwoven with that on the 'pellegrino', a definitely floating concept insofar as the 'pellegrino' (as we have seen, one of the possible translations of *hostis*) is such precisely as

far as it belongs to the domain of otherness foreign, and is therefore completely emptied once incorporated within the perimeter of familiarity ('e ciò~~e~~ è tanto vero,' writes Leopardi, 'che se quella cosa pellegrina, p.e. quella voce, frase, metafora, diventa usuale e comune, non è più elegante', *Zib.* 1324).

> Se osserveremo bene in che cosa consista l'eleganza delle scritture, l'eleganza di una parola, di un modo ec., vedremo ch'ella sempre consiste in un piccolo irregolare, o in un piccolo straordinario o nuovo, che non distrugge punto il regolare e il conveniente dello stile o della lingua, anzi gli dà risalto, e risalta esso stesso; e ci sorprende che risaltando, ed essendo non ordinario, ~~ec~~o fuor della regola, non disconvenga; e questa sorpresa cagiona il piacere e il senso dell'eleganza e della grazia delle scritture. (Qui discorrete degl'idiotismi ec. ec.) Il pellegrino delle voci o dei modi, se è eccessivamente pellegrino, o eccessivo per frequenza ec. distrugge l'ordine, la regola, la convenienza, ed è fonte di bruttezza. Nel caso contrario è fonte di eleganza in modo che se osserverete lo stile di Virgilio o di Orazio, modelli di eleganza a tutti secoli, vedrete che l'eleganza loro principalissimamente e generalmente consiste nel pellegrino dei modi e delle voci, o delle loro applicazioni a quel tal uso, luogo, significazione, nel pellegrino delle metafore ec. Cominciando dal primo verso sino all'ultimo potrete far sempre la stessa osservazione. (*Zib.* 1323-24, 14 July 1821)

The space of grace is hence that of detail: the acknowledgment of grace requires a specific attention, a philology of the infinitesimal which can be able to retrace such imperceptible effect, which is constantly situated on a fracture between beauty and affectation. 'La grazia' writes Leopardi on 17 July 1821, 'deriva dallo straordinario […], che quando è troppo, per un verso o per un altro, cagiona l'effetto opposto': still, 'e l'inusitato è pur l'<u>unica</u> fonte dell'eleganza' (*Zib.* 1336). 'Il grazioso deriv[a] dallo straordinario, cioè da quello ch'è fuor dell'ordine *sino a un certo punto*' (*Zib.* 1327, emphasis mine): on 17 October 1821, Leopardi situates poetic elegance in 'quelle proprietà, quelle facoltà, modi, forme, metafore, usi di parole o di locuzioni, che si allontanano dal costume e dalla natura della nostra ~~x~~lingua, senza però […] discostarsene di troppo', thereby engendering a 'straordinario *fino a un certo segno*, e in modo ch'egli faccia colpo senza <u>choquer</u> le nostre assuefazioni' (*Zib.* 1937, emphasis mine). The 'certo punto' and 'certo segno', in being undetermined definitions as that of 'je ne

sais quoi', constitute the indefinite space that the caring eye of the poet-philologist must analyse in order to retrace the alchemy of grace: a task which has become more challenging insofar as the historical moment of modernity has definitely marked the fracture between nature and culture, thus situating the domain of 'je ne sais quoi' in an artificial simplicity.

> lo sgraziato non deriva mai dalla natura (anzi le […] qualità naturali, sono graziose sempre ec. ec.), ma bensì frequentemente dall'arte, e questa non è mai fonte di grazia nè di convenienza, se non quando ha ricondotto l'uomo alla natura, o all'imitazione di essa, cio è [sic] alla disinvoltura, all'inaffettato, alla naturalezza ec. E l'andamento necessario dell'arte, è quasi sempre questo. Farci disimparare quello che già sapevamo senza fatica, e toglierci quelle qualità che possedevamo naturalmente. Poi con grande stento, esercizio, tempo, tornarci a insegnare le stesse cose, e restituirci le stesse qualità, o poco differenti. Giacchè quella modestia, quella timidezza, quella vergogna naturale ec. si trova bene spesso in molti, non più naturale, chè l'hanno perduta, ma artifiziale, chè mediante l'arte appoco appoco e stentatamente l'hanno ricuperata. (*Zib.* 1330, 15 July 1821)

The establishment of a theory of grace implies hence a strong contextualisation from a historical angle, as well as a clear acknowledgment of cultural differences: this is the only perspective from which a fully national poetry can be conceived. On the one hand, Leopardi remarks how the naiveté that we retrace in the 'ancients' is such for us only, and precisely because we are moderns: 'diversa è l'impressione che a noi produce la semplicità degli scrittori greci, v. g. Omero, da quella che produceva ne' contemporanei', to which 'appunto perchè naturale, pareva bella, cioè conveniente, perchè conforme alle loro assuefazioni, ma non graziosa, o certo meno che a noi' (*Zib.* 1366, 21 July 1821).[303] Similarly, Petrarch did not perceive in his Italian writings the same elements of charm that we can find there in modern times:

[303] See also *Zib.* 2515: 'E quella ricchissima, fecondissima, ~~fe~~ potentissima, ~~variatissima~~ regolatissima, e al tempo stesso variatissima, poetichissima e naturalissima lingua del cinquecento, ch'a noi (ne' suoi buoni scrittori) riesce così elegante, forse ch'allora fu tenuta per tale? Signor no, ma per corrotta' (29 June 1822).

Egli certo non sentiva in quella lingua illetterata e spregiata ch'egli maneggiava, in quello stile ch'egli formava, la bellezza, il pregio e il piacere di quell'eleganza, di quella grazia, naturalezza, semplicità, nobiltà, forza, purità che noi vi sentiamo a prima giunta. Egli non si credeva nè puro (in una lingua tutta impura e barbara come giudicavasi la italiana, corruzione della latina) nè nobile, nè elegante ec. ec. L'opinione, l'assuefazione ec. o piuttosto la mancanza di esse glielo impedivano. (*Zib.* 1580, 28 August 1821)

On the other hand, foreigners appreciate as gracious and naif 'mille cose che ~~no~~ ~~ai~~ a noi italiani (se conserviamo il gusto italiano, o l'antico) e anche agli altri, paiono o affettate o certo ricercate, artifiziate, studiate; o finalmente assai meno vicine alla natura di quello che paiono ai francesi, e quindi vi sentiamo assai meno grazia e bellezza, o nessuna, o anche bruttezza' (*Zib.* 1416, 30 July 1821). In sum,

siccome il piacer che si riceve dal bello, dal grazioso ec. è bene spesso in ragione dello straordinario dentro certi limiti, così noi proviamo della semplicità de' greci de' trecentisti ec. maggior piacere assai che i loro contemporanei, e quindi l'ammiriamo di più, e la troviamo assai spesso più bella ec. Così pure accade secondo le diverse nazioni (*Zib.* 1419-20, 30 July 1820).

The task of grasping grace obliges then to move on an ambiguous hedge, between simplicty and art, between naturalness and technique: grace is the only poetic resource left to moderns, who are compelled – as Montesquieu had already stated – to 'travailler à être naïf'. In the course of his research, Leopardi goes then back to one of the key texts of the 'je ne sais quoi', Baldassar Castiglione's *Libro del Cortegiano*, where 'je ne sais quoi' was inserted within the culture of 'honnêteté' and connected with the 'sprezzatura' as the most sublime form of 'unaffection'.[304] Leopardi's inquiry into the possibilities for making poetry in modern times is never disjointed from his self-construction as an 'eroe-gentiluomo',[305] and poetry is hence, first of all, a matter of style.

[304] Cf. Scholar, *The 'Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi'*, p. 191.
[305] Bollati, 'Introduction' to Leopardi, *Crestomazia italiana. La prosa*, p. lxxxix.

Grazia dal contrasto. Conte Baldessar Castiglione, Il Libro del Cortegiano. lib.1. Milano, dalla Società tipogr. De' Classici italiani, 1803. vol.1. p.43-4. Ma ~~io~~ avendo io già più volte pensato meco, onde nasca questa grazia, lasciando quegli che dalle stelle l'hanno, trovo una regola universalissima; la qual mi par valer circa questo in tutte le cose umane, che si facciano, o dicano, più che alcuna altra; e ciò è fuggir quanto più si può, e come un asperissimo e pericoloso scoglio la affettazione; e, per dir forse una nuova parola, usar in ogni cosa una certa sprezzatura, che nasconda l'arte, e dimostri, ciò che si fa, e dice, venir fatto senza fatica, e quasi senza pensarvi. Da questo credo io che derivi assai la grazia: perchè delle cose rare, e ben fatte ognun sa (p.44. dell'ediz.) la ~~f~~ difficultà, onde in esse la facilità genera grandissima maraviglia; ~~e per lo~~ e per lo contrario, lo sforzare, e, come si dice, tirar per i capegli, dà somma disgrazia, e fa estimar poco ogni cosa, per grande ch'ella si sia. (*Zib.* 2682, 14 March 1823)

It is from Castiglione's theorisation of style that Leopardi goes back, in August 1823, to the undefinability of the notion of grace and to the kind of 'je ne sais quoi' that he had defined as 'molle, insinuante, *glissante* dolcemente nell'anima'. The 'artisti', the connoisseurs ('intendenti') and the 'speculatori teorici o pratici del bello' perceive better, he writes, a kind of grace which is 'più graziosa e più fina' because it does not arise from mere imperfection, but engendering an 'effetto […] più spirituale e più delicato'. Characterised by 'indefinibilità' and 'inconcepibilità', such grace

è quasi un soave e delicatissimo odore di gelsomino o di rosa, che nulla ha di acuto nè di mordente, o quasi uno spiro di vento che vi reca una fragranza improvvisa, la quale sparisce appena avete avuto il tempo di sentirla, e vi lascia con desiderio, ma vano, di tornarla a sentir~~l~~e, e lungamente, e saziarvene. (*Zib.* 3178-79, 16 August 1823)

This passage openly echoes what Leopardi had written on Anacreon and Zappi, thereby connecting his first impressions about the 'certain something' of Anacreon's poetry to his own 'theory of grace' as developed in the *Zibaldone*. In this case, the 'aura' and 'fragrance' are matters of style, whose alchemy can be retraced by a careful vigilance on language: 'quanta parte di un'opera è lo stile!', had written Leopardi precisely apropos of Castiglione,

and ‘quanta parte dello stile è quasi tutt’uno colla lingua!’ (*Zib.* 2797-98, 19 June 1823). In the same way, indeterminacy and ‘je ne sais quoi’ are matters of language, that one can individuate in specific linguistic units as manifestations of foreignness and disorder, as Leopardi noted in 1821:

Se attentamente riguarderemo in che ~~e~~soglia consistere l'eleganza delle parole, dei modi, delle forme, dello stile, vedremo quanto sovente anzi sempre ella consista nell'indeterminato, […] o in ~~non so che~~ qualcosa d'irregolare, cioè nelle qualità contrarie a quelle che ~~si ricercano mass~~ principalmente si ricercano nello scrivere didascalico~~.~~ o dottrinale. (*Zib.* 1312, 13 July 1821)

Here, Leopardi’s deletion of ‘non so che’ is particularly meaningful, in again avoiding Montesquieu’s expression. Explicitly recalling this passage, Leopardi notes some days later that

Per l'indeterminato può servir di esempio Virg. En. 1. 465. <u>Sunt lacrimae rerum: et mentem mortalia tangunt</u>. Quanto all'irregolare, abbiamo veduto […] che l’eleganza propriamente detta deriva sempre dal p~~a~~ellegrino e diviso dal comun favellare, il che per un verso o per un altro è sempre qualcosa d'irregolare, sia perchè quella parola è forestiera, e quindi ~~non~~ è, non dirò contro le regole, ma irregolare, ~~e~~o fuor delle regole l’usarla; sia perchè quel modo è nuovamente fabbricato comunque si voglia ec. Ed osservate che, escluso sempre l'eccesso, il quale produce il contrario dell’eleganza, dentro i limiti di quella irregolarità che può essere elegante, la eleganza maggiore o minore, è bene spesso e si sente, in proporzione della maggiore o minore irregolarità. Ciò non solo quanto alla lingua, ma allo stile ec. Nell’ordine non v'è mai eleganza propriamente detta. Vi sarà armonia, simmetria ec. ma l'eleganza nel puro e rigoroso ordine non può stare. ~~(~~Nè vi può star la natura, ma la ragione, che l'ordine è sempre segno di ragione in qualunque cosa. (*Zib.* 1337, 17 July 1821)

The problem of poetry, as posed by the theory of grace, arises therefore from the tension between the unavoidably denotative (‘geometrica’) nature of modern languages and those elements that trouble it ‘to a certain degree’. This category roughly reproposes the twofold nature of grace already sketched in 1820, which distinguished between the ‘piccante’ (what later will be called ‘il brutto nel bello’, made of irregularities and ‘idiotismi’) and the ‘molle,

insinuante' kind of grace, namely the naïf feeling of the 'vague and indefinite' (visual, spatial, of feeling). As a tension between regularity and irregularity, between pure beauty and variety as the only source of grace, this theorisation crosses the problem of the quest for a perfect language as far as it does not look for a 'lingua […] definitamente poetica', still acknowledging that 'certo è bruttissima e inanimata quella lingua che è definitamente matematica. La migliore di tutte le lingue è quella che può esser l'uno e l'altro, e racchiudere eziandio tutti i gradi che corrono fra questi due estremi' (*Zib.* 643, 11 February 1821).

Language becomes then the privileged place where such an antinomy can be retraced, by a dissection of rhetorical strategies aimed to establish a theory of the poetic sign: in the composition of tropes, affection and technique interact in order to produce the 'je ne sais quoi' of poetry.

Immaginazione continuam. fresca ed operante si richiede a poter ~~saisir,~~ i rapporti, le affinità, le somiglianze ec. ec. ~~d~~ o ver~~i~~e, o apparenti, poetiche ec. degli oggetti e delle cose tra loro, o a scoprire questi rapporti, o ad ~~esp~~ inventarli ec. cose che bisogna continuamente fare volendo parlar ~~fi~~ metaforico e figurato, e che queste metafore e figure e questo parlare abbiano del nuovo e originale e del proprio dell'~~at~~ autore. Lascio le similitudini: una metafora nuova che si contenga pure in una parola sola, ha bisogno dell'immaginaz. e invenz. che ho detto. Or di queste metafore e figure ec. ne dev'esser composto tutto lo stile e tutta l'espressione de' concetti del poeta. Continua immaginazione, sempre viva, sempre rappresentantie le cose agli occhi del poeta, e mostrantegliele come presenti, si richiede a poter significare le cose o le azioni o le idee ~~p~~ ec. per mezzo di ~~ci~~ una ~~x~~o due circostanze o qualità o parti di esse le più minute, le più minute, sfuggevoli, le meno notate, le meno ~~espr~~ solite ad essere espresse dagli altri poeti, o ~~ad~~ ad esser prese per rappresentare tutta l'immagine, le più efficaci ed atte o per se, o per questa stessa novità o insolitezza di esser notate o espresse, o della loro applicaz. ed uso ec., le più atte dico a significar l'idea da esprimersi, a rappresentarla al vivo a destarla con efficacia ec. […] Or non si possono adoperar tali mezzi, nè produr tali effetti (che con altri mezzi, nello stile, non si ottengono) senza una continua e non mai interrotta azione, vivacità e freschezza d'immaginazione. E sempre ch'essa langue, langue lo stile, sia pure immaginosissima e poetichissima l'invenzione e la qualità delle cose in esso trattate ed espresse. Poetiche saranno le cose, lo stile no; e peggiore sarà l'effetto, che se quelle ancora fossero impoetiche; per il contrasto e sconvenienza ec. che sarà tanto maggiore quanto quelle e l'invenzione ec. saranno più immaginose e poetiche. (*Zib.* 3717-19)

What a poet-philologist is therefore required to do, is to retrace those linguistic units which, because of their intrinsic power or through their insertion within the text, are able to evoke poetic feelings by conveying the poet's 'imagination'. Philology must therefore be employed in order to plunge into the text of tradition and to dissect the alchemies of poetic effect.

3.e. Poetry and Detail

The choice of translating 'je ne sais quoi' by 'grazia' does not only denote the privileged place always assigned by Leopardi to concepts with a classical derivation, but also the aim of theorising grace in the same way as Longinus had theorised the sublime, namely through a 'grammatica della produzione [del sublime]' that can be seen as a veritable 'semiotica del testo' *ante litteram*.[306] As we have seen, the construction of a theory of poetic effects in the *Zibaldone* is arguably inspired by the pseudo-Longinus's *Perì Hýpsous* first of all as a paragon in quotation practice. The treatise on the sublime actually provided a replicable model for the dissection of a literary canon into small parcels, that could be analysed from the point of view of effect as it is reached by means of composition of tropes. Leopardi's analysis aims therefore to be a sort of *Perì Hýpsous* for modern times, either because of its object – a kind of aesthetic pleasure that only the the fracture of the Enlightenment has made possible – and of its perspective: while Longinus had defined 'pulchra et vera Sublimia, quæ simper et omnibus placet',[307] Leopardi's inquiry, as grounded in history and psychology, constantly states the ultimately relative nature of every kind of aesthetic enjoyment.

[306] Umberto Eco, 'Sullo stile', in Id., *Sulla letteratura* (Milan: Bompiani, 2004), pp. 172-90, pp. 189-90.
[307] Longinus, *Dionysii Longini quæ supersunt*, p. 63.

Many passages of the *Zibaldone* concern the intrinsic poetic effect of determined lexical units. Leopardi begins noting such effects in the summer of 1821, in the same moment as he definitely theorises grace as the 'extraordinary within beauty'. Such extraordinary corresponds to the ideas of 'vastity', 'vagueness' and 'indeterminacy' that specific expressions convey at a connotative level: in most cases, these units are considered in themselves, and analysed with a specific structure. In July 1821, Leopardi notes, for example, that in French 'bois significa tanto bosco o selva quanto legno in genere': the synecdoche determines an effect of indeterminacy, so that 'anche fra noi poeticamente si direbbe molto bene selva ec. per legna ec. come presso a' poeti latini' (*Zib.* 1282, 2-5 July 1821). The analysis is more frequent in case of words that connote vastity, which can be intended as referring to the spheres of space, time and feeling:

> Le parole irrevocabile, irremeabile e altre tali, ~~sa~~produrranno sempre una sensazione piacevole […] perchè destano un'idea senza limiti, e non possibile a concepirsi interamente. E però saranno sempre poeticissime: e di queste tali parole sa far uso, e giovarsi con grandissimo effetto il vero ~~x~~poeta. (*Zib.* 1534, 20 August 1821)

> Le parole notte notturno ec. le descrizioni della notte ec. sono poeticissime, perchè la notte confondendo gli oggetti, l'animo non ne concepisce che un'immagine vaga, indistinta, incompleta, sì di essa, che quanto ella contiene. Così oscurità, profondo. ec. ec. (*Zib.* 1798, 28 September 1821)

> Posteri, posterità, (e questo più perchè più generale) futuro, passato, eterno, lungo in fatto di tempo, morte, mortale, immortale, e cento simili, son parole di senso o di significazione quanto indefinita, tanto poetica e nobile, e perciò cagione di nobiltà, di bellezza ec. a tutti gli stili. (*Zib.* 1930, 16 October 1821)

> Tutto ciò che è finito, tutto ciò che è ultimo, desta sempre naturalmente nell'uomo un sentimento di dolore, e di malinconia. Nel tempo stesso eccita un sentimento piacevole, e piacevole nel medesimo dolore, e ciò a causa dell'infinità dell'idea che si contiene in queste parole finito, ultimo ec. (le quali però sono di lor natura, e saranno sempre poeticissime, per usuali e volgari che sieno, in qualunque lingua e stile) (*Zib.* 2251, 13 December 1821)

> Antichi, antico, antichità; posteri, posterità sono parole poeticissime ec. perchè contengono un'idea 1. vasta, 2. indefinita ed incerta, massime posterità della quale non sappiamo nulla, ed antichità similmente è cosa oscurissima per noi. Del resto tutte le parole che esprimono

generalità, o una cosa in generale, appartengono a queste considerazioni (*Zib.* 2263, 20 December 1821)

Alto, altezza e simili sono parole e idee poetiche ec. per le ragioni accennate altrove, […] e così le immagini che spettano a questa qualità. (*Zib.* 2350, 14 January 1822)

A ciò che ho detto altrove delle voci ermo, eremo, romito, hermite, hermitage, hermita ec. tutte fatte dal greco *érēmos*, aggiungi lo spagnuolo ermo, ed ermar (con ermador ec.) che significa desolare, vastare, appunto come il greco *érēmos*. […] Queste voci e simili sono tutte poetiche per l'infinità o vastità dell'idea ec. ec. Così la deserta notte, e tali immagini di solitudine, silenzio ec. (*Zib.* 2629, 3 October 1822)

Along with these isolated considerations, Leopardi returns sometimes to quotations, in the style of the pseudo-Longinus. A first example is one of September 1821:

Le parole lontano, antico, e simili sono poeticissime e piacevoli, perchè destano idee vaste, e indefinite, e non determinabili e confuse. Così in quella divina stanza dell'Ariosto (I. 65.)
Quale stordito e stupido aratore,
Poi ch'è passato il fulmine, si leva
Di ~~la~~ là dove l'altissimo fragore
Presso a gli uccisi buoi steso l'aveva,
Che mira senza fronde e senza onore
Il pin che di lontan veder soleva;
Tal si levò il Pagano a piè rimaso,
Angelica presente al duro caso.
Dove l'effetto delle parole di lontano si unisce a quello del soleva, parola di significato egualmente vasto per la copia delle rimembranze che contiene. Togliete queste due parole ed idee; l'effetto di quel verso si perde, e si scema se togliete l'una delle delle [sic] due. (*Zib.* 1789, 25 September 1821.)

Another example is a passage of 3 October of the same year: the employ of the adverb 'tanto' is underlined by the comparison of two passages by Petrarch and Ippolito Pindemonte. In both cases, the vagueness of the lemma determines an effect of infinity, giving poems a peculiar flavour of poetry:

Le parole che indicano moltitudine, copia, grandezza, lunghezza, larghezza, altezza, vastità ec. ec. sia in estensione, o in forza, intensità ec. ec. sono pure poeticissime, e così le immagini corrispondenti. Come nel Petr.

Te solo aspetto, e quel che tanto amasti,
E laggiuso è rimaso, il mio bel velo.
E in Ippolito Pindemonte
Fermossi alfine il cor che balzò tanto.
Dove notate che il tanto essendo indefinito, fa maggiore effetto che non farebbe molto, moltissimo eccessivamente, sommamente. Così pure le parole e le idee ultimo, mai più, l'ultima volta ec. ec. sono di grand'effetto poetico, per l'infinità. ecc. (*Zib.* 1825-26)

The structure of argumentation is here clearly derived from that of Longinus: while comparing a passage of Homer with one by Aratus on the same subject of a shipwreck, Longinus remarks how Arato's verse is 'exilis […] et venustus vice terribilis: [Aratus] præterea terminus periculos constituit dicendo, *lignum probibet mortem*'; while Homer

ne semel terminos constituit et, quod terribile est; sed repræsentat *homines* semper et pæne and singulos fluctus sæpe pereuntes: et quidem præpositiones, quæ conjungi non possunt, cogens contra *ipsarum* naturam, alteramque in alteram vi urgens, *yp'ek thanátoio*, tormento affecit versum ad similitudinem incidentis *nautis* tempestatis; et violentia versui adhibita, id, quod *in tempestate* patiuntur, magnifice effinxit, et tantum non impressit dictioni *impsam* periculi naturam *yp'ek thanátoio férontai*'.[308]

The isolation of expressions is singularly close to Leopardi's one, as well as the insistence on vagueness ('ne semel terminos constituit et, quod terribile est'). In another passage, Longinus stresses the problem of syllabes' quantity, namely the evocative power of the signifier in itself ('ob harmoniam non minus quam ob sententiam sonorus est'). Leopardi does not understimate this aspect as well: in 1823, he speaks about 'le idee concomitanti annesse alla significazione o anche al suono stesso e ad altre qualità delle parole, le quali idee hanno tanta parte nell'effetto, massimamente poetico ovvero oratorio ec., delle scritture' (*Zib.* 3952, 7 December).

[308] Ibid., pp. 79-80.

Sublimis hic sensus videtur, et est revera admirabilis, quem de plebiscito profert Demosthenes: 'Hoc plebiscitum fecit, ut periculum, quod urbem tunc temporis circumstetit, velut nubes transiret.' Sed ob harmoniam non minus quam ob sententiam sonorus est: totus enim *sensus* per dactylicos numeros dictus est; hi vero sunt nobilissimi et Sublimitatem efficientes; quapropter metrum Heroum, eorum quæ novimus præstantissimum, constituunt. *Et hoc* […] *rite claudit sententiam*; nam ex proprio loco illud transfer, ubi sane velis, *ut fit, exempli gratia* […], vel mehercule unam solam syllabam *ejus* rescinde […] et videbis quantum harmonia cum Sublimitatem conspiret; […] sed, abscissa una Syllaba, […] statim *illud* imminuit abscissione Sublimitatem: ut e contrario, si *illud* extendas, […] idem significant: non tamen idem *jam* cadit; quia longitudine ultimorum temporum dissolvitur et relaxatur ea Sublimitas, quæ *nunc* præcise abrupta est.[309]

The pseudo-Longinus is explicitly echoed, both in the custom of addressing an imagined public ('notate'; 'videbis') and in the didactic explanation ('Togliete queste due parole ed idee; l'effetto di quel verso si perde, e si scema se togliete l'una delle due'; 'vel mehercule unam solam syllabam *ejus* rescinde […] et videbis quantum harmonia cum Sublimitatem conspiret').

Through this argumentative structure, in December 1821, Leopardi comments a passage from Virgil: his aim is to show the intrinsically 'most vague' nature of Latin and of ancient languages in general. 'La lingua latina', writes Leopardi,

così esatta, così regolata, e definita, ha nondimeno moltissime frasi ec. che per la stessa natura loro, e del linguaggio latino, sono di significato così vago, che a determinarlo, e renderlo preciso non basta qualsivoglia scienza di latino, e non avrebbe bastato l'esser nato latino, perocch'elle son vaghe per se medesime, e quella tal frase e la vaghezza della significazione sono per essenza loro inseparabili, nè ~~l'una~~ quella può sussistere senza questa. (*Zib.* 2288-89, 26 December)

Leopardi is quoting here a passage from *Georgics*, where a 'frase regolarissima' is 'nondimeno regolarmente e gramaticalmente indefinita di significazione': the nature of Latin

[309] Ibid., pp. 150-51. Traces of this passage can be found on page 2240 of the *Zibaldone*, where Leopardi speaks of the 'elocuzione' and 'prosa la più alta, come è quella di Demostene', considering that 'Cicerone è un poeta per lo stile e la lingua, laddove egli è quasi un prosatore ne' concetti, passioni ec. rispetto a Demostene poeta, o certo più poeta di Cicerone' (10 December 1821).

ablative determines an irreducible undecidability on the level of signification, because of which it is impossible to know in a definite way if the expression 'Zephyro' means 'al zefiro, per lo zefiro, col zefiro ec.'. 'Zephyro' is therefore an isotopy of the kind defined by Eco as 'isotopia narrativa non vincolata a disgiunzioni isotopiche discorsive che generano in ogni caso storie complementari': all senses are included in the expression, and the 'isotopie […] si rafforzano a vicenda' which, for Leopardi, is precisely the effect of poetry.[310] Leopardi's conclusion is that grammatical correctness and regulation is radically independent from the peculiar indefiniteness of each language, in which its possibilities of poetry-making are grounded: 'cento mila di questa e simili nature, regolarissime, latinissime, conformissime alla gramatica, e alla costruzione latina, prive o affatto, o quasi affatto d'ogni figura di dizione, [sono] tuttavolta vaghissime e indefinibili di significato, non solo a noi, ma agli stessi latini'. In the same way, speaking the expression 'fama rerum' in Tacitus's *Agricola*, Leopardi will consider in March 1829 those sentences that evoke

> un'idea vastiss., o una moltitudine di idee, e nel modo il più indefinito. Di tali frasi, e, in generale, della facoltà di esprimersi in siffatta guisa, abbondano le lingue antiche; la latina specialm., anche più della greca: e quindi è che la prosa lat., p. l'espress. e il linguag., (non p. le idee, e lo stile, come la franc.) è sovente più poetica del verso, non pur moderno, ma greco; benchè il lat. non abbia ling. poet. a parte. (*Zib.* 4473-74, 28 March)

The acknowledgment of a connection between vagueness and the antique is, furthermore, present in Leopardi from the beginning, and from 1826 onwards – arguably, in the course of his researches for the *Crestomazia de' prosatori* – the antique appears strictly joined, in the reflection of the *Zibaldone*, to poetry and the poetic. Since they are already vague by their intrinsic nature, as the examples taken from the *Georgics* and the *Agricola* testify, ancient

[310] Eco, *Lector in fabula*, p. 100.

languages (and antiquity itself) are for us the more vague and poetic precisely because of their distance:

In Omero tutto è vàgo, tutto è supremamente poetico nella maggior verità e proprietà e nella maggior forza ed estensione del termine; incominciando dalla persona e storia sua, ~~Omero~~ ch'è tutta involta e seppellita nel mistero, oltre alla somma antichità e lontananza e diversità de' suoi tempi da' posteriori e da [sic] nostri massimam. e sempre maggiore di mano in mano. (essendo esso il più antico, non solo scrittore che ci rimanga, ma monumento dell'antichità profana; la più antica parte dell'antichità superstite), che tanto contribuisce per se stessa a favorire l'immaginazione. Omero sètesso è un'idea vaga e conseguentemente poetica. Tanto che si è anche dubitato e si dubita ch'ei non sia stato mai altro veramente che un'idea (*Zib.* 3975, 12 December 1823)

In January 1821, in the course of a wide reading of Florus, Leopardi compared Latin and Italian texts. This exercise aims to retrace the persistence of Latin structures within the Italian language: these survivals are veritable *Nachleben der Antike* that determine specific poetic effects, even within Dante's and Petrarch's texts:

Come dice Dante Quinci si va, chi vuole andar per pace, idiotismo assai comune e usitato nella nostra lingua, così anche i latini. Floro II. 15. sul principio: Atque si quis trium temporum momenta consideret, primo commissum bellum, profligatum secundo, tertio vero confectum est. (502, 14 January 1821)

Il Petrarca nella canzone Italia mia.
Ed è questo del seme,
Per più ~~rossor,~~ dolor, del popol senza legge
Al qual, come si legge,
Mario aperse sì 'l fianco,
Che memoria ~~del fatto~~ de l'opra anco non langue,
Quando assetato e stanco,
Non più bevve del fiume acqua che sangue.
Non è stato ~~so se abbiano~~ osservato, ch'io sappia, che quest'ultima iperbole è levata di peso da Floro III. 3. nel~~la~~ racconto che fa di quella medesima battaglia contro i Teutoni, della quale il Petrarca. Ut victor Romanus de cruento flumine non plus aquae biberit quam sanguinis Barbarorum. Giacchè l'armata Romana era assetata, e combattè quasi per l'acqua. (*Zib.* 509, 15 January 1821)

Antique expressions and words seduce precisely because they are ancient, and have therefore become foreign and 'pellegrine': as Leopardi will state in 1826, 'senza l'antico non vi può esser lingua poetica' (*Zib.* 4214, 12 October). If 'gran parte delle voci che in poesia si chiamano eleganti, e si tengono per poetiche, non sono tali, se non per esser fuori dell'uso comune e familiare' (*Zib.* 2639, 15 October 1822), ancient lexical units are intrinsically poetic: 'E nótisi che *kárta* per valde mostra d'essere antichissimo, ond'egli è poetico ec. piucch'altro ec. V. Forcell. Gloss. Diz. franc. spagn. ital. Anche i latini vehementer, vehemens ec.' (*Zib.* 3761, 23 October 1823). The consideration will be later widened to Biblical scripture:

> Ci paiono poetichissime, ed amiamo a ripetere, molteiss. frasi scritturali, che non sappiamo che significhino, anzi che rapporto abbiano quelle voci tra loro, (come l'abominazione della desolazione, ec. ec.): e ciò p. quel vago, e perchè appunto non sappiamo precisare a noi stessi, e non intendiamo se non confusissimam. e in generalissimo, che cosa si voglian dire. (*Zib.* 4490, 19 April 1829)

The dissection of the canon with a philological perspective is therefore the only way through which a poetic vocabulary can be formed, in order to 'poter significare le cose o le azioni o le idee p ec. per mezzo di ci una xo due circostanze o qualità o parti di esse le più minute, le più minute, sfuggevoli, le meno notate, le meno espr solite ad essere espresse dagli altri poeti' (*Zib.* 3718, 17 October 1823). From this perspective, it is interesting to remark how 'L'infinito' (1819) seems to be entirely formed by those intrinsically poetic units later retraced by Leopardi, *a posteriori*, in the canon: as if, through such immersion within classical and Italian poetic traditions, he meant to retrospectively explain and clarify the hidden alchemy of his (Anacreontic?) idyll composed at the age of twenty-one.

Sempre caro mi fu quest'*ermo* colle,

e questa siepe, che da *tanta* parte
de l'*ultimo* orizzonte il guardo esclude.
Ma *sedendo* e *mirando*, *interminati*
spazi di là da quella, e *sovrumani*
silenzi, e profondissima quiete
io nel pensier mi fingo; ove per poco
il *cor* non si spaura. E come il vento
odo stormir tra queste piante, io quello
infinito silenzio a questa voce
vo *comparando*: e *mi sovvien* l'eterno,
e le morte stagioni, e la presente
e viva, e il suon di lei. Così tra questa
immensità *s'annega* il pensier mio:
e il *naufraga*r m'è dolce in questo mare. (emphasis mine)

Here, examples of Anacreontic grace ('Sempre', 'ermo', the 'tanto' analyzed in Ariosto) collide with techniques belonging to the sublime, such as the use of the substantive 'cor' already remarked as 'happy' and sublime in Chiabrera ('nel che alle volte fu felice, come: Canz. Eroica 23: Qual non fe² scempio sanguinoso acerbo L'aspro cor dell'Eacide superbo?', *Zib.* 24) and the image itself of a shipwreck. In particular, the use of the gerund ('sedendo', mirando') has echoes in the notion of grace elaborated in the *Zibaldone* as a light and fleeting movement: the gerund expresses 'una languida continuazione della cosa, un'azione più languida, e meno continua, ed anche interrotta; e di più un'azione meno perfetta' (*Zib.* 1155, 11 June 1821), thereby echoing the conceptualisation of imperfection as a constitutive element of 'je ne sais quoi'. Gerund is one of the features of Italian language that produce those 'varietà ed […] eleganza che nasc[ono] dalla novità ec. e dall'inusitato' (1333, 17 July 1821) which are the sources of grace.

There is, however, an element, which, although present in the 'Infinito', is not recognised by Leopardi as intrinsic to vagueness and grace until a later phase: the dimension of memory. Between 1828 and 1829, Leopardi carries out an eloquent turn in his theory, stating that images are not poetic by themselves, but they are such in so far as they are grounded in

childhood, in the fascination for indeterminacy which is characteristic of that age. Infancy, as the closest moment to antiquity in human life, is the age when we feel the charming power of whatever is 'vague' and of the 'indefinite' (and therefore gracious) at its most. Every poetic effect is therefore, and first of all, mediated by memory. Poetry is the acknowledgment of a remembrance, of an 'ancient' state of mind in which we have suddenly fallen and which has (as the 'aura' conjured by Anacreon's poetry) fleetingly disappeared.

Un oggetto qualunque, p. e. un luogo, un sito, una campagna, p. bella che sia, se non desta alcuna rimembranza, non è poetica punto a vederla. La medesima, ed anche un sito, un oggetto qualunque, affatto impoetico in se, sarà poetichissimo a rimembrarlo. La rimembranza è essenziale e principale nel sentimento poetico, non p. altro, se non perchè il presente, qual ch'egli sia, non può esser poetico; e il poetico, in uno o in altro modo, si trova sempre consistere nel lontano, nell'indefinito, nel vago. (*Zib.* 4426, 14 December 1828)

Il piacere che ci danno un certo stile semplice e naturale (come l'omerico), le immagini fanciullesche, e quindi popolari, circa i fenomeni, la cosmografia ec.; in somma il piacere che ci dà la poesia, dico la poesia antica e d'immagini; tra le sue cagioni, ha una delle principali, se non la principale assolutamente, la rimembranza confusa della nostra fanciullezza che ci è destata da tal poesia. La qual rimembranza è, fra tutte, la più grata e la più poetica; e ciò, principalmente forse, perchè essa è più rimembranza che le altre, cioè a dire, perchè è la più lontana e più vaga. (*Zib.* 4427, 1 January 1829)

Similm. molte immagini, letture ec. ci fanno un'impression

letture in altri tempi, e massimam. nella fanciullezza o nella prima gioventù. Questa cosa è frequentiss.a: ardisco dire che qua

, e le prendiamo p.
impressioni primitive~~.~~, dirette e non riflesse. Quindi ancora è manifesto che una poesia ec. dee
parere ad un tale assai più bella che un'altra, indipendetem. dal merito intrinseco. ec. ec. (4515, 24 May 1829)

What has happened? These passages date exactly in between 'A Silvia' (April 1828) and 'Le Ricordanze' (August-September 1829). It is likely that the failure of Leopardi's 'political' and 'civil' projects (the *Operette* and the *Crestomazia de' prosatori*) led him to an ultimate devaluation of the 'objective'; in parallel, it is arguable that the undistinguishable

interweavment of personal and cultivated memory, of individual and historical reminiscence, of popular and sophisticated language of his absolutely 'new' idyllic style must by needs imply a rethinking of his own alchemy of poetry, situating grace and levity in a liminal zone between innocence and experience, between remembrance and a sorrowful self-consciousness, and between pre-verbal illusion and language itself as a structure to be manipulated. It is perhaps not by chance that, in 'A Silvia', Leopardi precisely manages to reach a double, ambiguous and definitely 'gracious' effect, which is the more striking as far as it implies a troubling and uncanny image. If the impression unwillingly made by Chiabrera's canzone 'in death of Orazio Zanchini' was merely ridiculous, in the closing of 'A Silvia' the image of the hand pointing at the tomb can be equally read as a *memento mori* or, as Franco d'Intino suggested, as an image of rebirth.[311] The visual power of the image is then double, shifting between neoclassical cemetery art and the iconography of *Noli me tangere*: individual and cultural memory violently interact, giving birth to the powerful nebulosity of an undetermined isotopy, in which the surgical vagueness of language skilfully reaches simplicity through the keenest lexical vigilance.

The 'canti pisano-recanatesi' are therefore the ultimate outcome of Leopardi's reflection on 'je ne sais quoi', as a research of naiveté through art and as the solution of the dichotomy between nature and culture: the evocative power of remembrance experienced in 1828-29 is grafted by Leopardi on the careful reflections on the most hidden alchemy of grace that he had led in the past eight years, thus shaping the *Canti* as an inextricable (and hence gracious) interweaving of subjectivity and universality, of technique and nonchalance.

[311] Cf. 'I misteri di Silvia. Motivo persefoneo e mistica eleusina in Leopardi', *Filologia e critica*, XIX, II (May-August 1994), pp. 211-71 and, more recently, *L'immagine della voce*, p. 172n.

THIRD SECTION

MEMORY, MYTHOLOGEM AND *PATHOSFORMEL* IN ‘LE RICORDANZE’

CHAPTER 1

THE PALACE OF MEMORY

Leopardi composed 'Le Ricordanze' in Recanati, between the end of August and the beginning of September 1829. After physically returning to his family house ('[i]l paterno giadino', l. 3), Leopardi gave birth to a poem in which – as I will show – individual and cultural memories collide, and which accomplishes Leopardi's search for an autobiographical form of writing through a composition that abolishes every logical or chronological connection. It can be said that 'Le Ricordanze' constantly shifts and moves between physical and poetic 'stanzas', those of the Leopardi palace and those of the poem, thus engendering an oscillatory movement that constructs the poem as a complex game of refractions. The memories conjured by the 'albergo ove abitai fancullo / e delle gioie mie vidi la fine' (l. 5-6) are almost immediately converted into the poetic undulations of the text, through a freewheeling monologism that aims to render the floating interweavement of past and present.[312]

The manuscript confirms this first impression of immediacy. The stanzas (which Luigi Blasucci vaguely defines as 'lasse', thus stressing the indeterminacy of the 'Ricordanze' with respect to the conventional metric rules of Italian literary tradition)[313] are already defined in the hand-written draft. In parallel, for the first time in the laboratory of the *Canti*, variants are

[312] As Blasucci writes, in 'Le Ricordanze' 'lo spunto poetico è offerto da un "ritorno" suscitatore di dolci ricordi. Ma a questa dolcezza subentra ora la coscienza di un tempo compiuto, di tante speranze rimaste in avverate: il ricordo stesso, allora, finisce col mutare di segno. L'impostazione del discorso su due tempi, il passato della memoria e il presente della delusione, ci riconduce al canto *A Silvia*: ma alla linearità di successione dei due tempi si sostituisce qui un movimento continuo e alterno tra passato e presente, in un "segreto fluttuare della memoria"' ('I tempi dei "Canti"', in Id., *I tempi dei 'Canti'*, pp. 177-218, p. 202.
[313] Ibid., p. 203.

not sketched on the margins of the page, but are directly incorporated between brackets within the text, so as to suggest a more fluid process of composition, grounded in semantic associations and affinities in sound.[314]

The intermediary point between palace and text – as well as between past and present – is memory, which is identified through the title as the object of the poem that the poetic 'I''s return to the 'borgo selvaggio' (l. 30) re-activates. This return is not merely a physical one, that of Leopardi to Recanati. The poem begins with an apostrophe addressed to the stars of the Ursa:

Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa, io non credea
tornare ancor per uso a contemplarvi
sul paterno giardino scintillanti
e ragionar con voi dalle finestre
di questo albergo ove abitai fanciullo (l. 1-5).

This passage can of course be understood as describing the unexpected return of Leopardi's to his father's house, and the habit ('per uso') of beholding the stars from *those* very windows, above *that* very garden: further still, it could equally be understood as conveying the surprise in recuperating a certain modality of seeing, facilitated by that specific place as the venue of childhood memories. As Alberto Folin recently remarked, 'è importante sottolineare che l'inatteso ritorno non va individuato in quello che Leopardi effettua concretamente nella casa paterna, quanto nel rinvenire alla capacità di "contemplare", cioè di rivedere il mondo nel suo impianto mitico'.[315] The idea of 'tornare ancor per uso' to behold the stars is therefore first and foremost the surprise of discovering one's self as being able to

[314] This peculiarity of the 'Ricordanze' had already been highlighted by Francesco Moroncini: see Emilio Peruzzi, in Giacomo Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. by Emilio Peruzzi (Milan: Rizzoli, 1998), pp. 471-72n.
[315] Alberto Folin, *Leopardi e il canto dell'addio* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008), p. 96.

feel the charming power of illusions. The symptom of this return to a 'savage mind'[316] is the habit of addressing the speech ('ragionar') to inanimate objects, which is precisely what the stars are, and which is a common feature both of children and of the 'ancients'. This notion is present in Leopardi's work since the first pages of the *Zibaldone*:

> Che bel tempo era quello nel quale ogni cosa era viva secondo l'immaginazione umana e viva umanamente cioè abitata o formata di esseri uguali a noi, quando nei boschi desertissimi si giudicava per certo che abita~~va~~ssero le belle driadi Amadriadi e i fauni e i silvani e ~~p~~Pane ec. ed entrandoci e vedendoci tutto solitudine pur credevi tutto abitato e così de' fonti abitati dalle ~~M~~Naiadi ec. e stringendoti un albero al seno te lo sentivi quasi palpitare fra le mani credendolo un uomo o donna come Ciparisso ec. e così de' fiori ec. come appunto i fanciulli. (*Zib.* 64 [1819])

This is what Leopardi implicitly defines as the '<u>sistema</u> […] mitologico' (*Zib.* 19), which – in being common to children and ancient cultures – is definitely intrinsic to human nature. This problem is also developed by Leopardi in his answer to Breme's apology of Romantic poetry, where he suggests that the mythological way of thinking essentially consists of investing inanimate objects with human nature ('questo dare agli oggetti inanimati, agli Dei, e fino ai propri affetti, ~~pe~~pensieri e forme e affetti umani'), and is 'così naturale all'uomo che per levargli questo vizio bisognerebbe rifarlo' (*Zib.* 19), so that the Romantic pretension of removing it in favour of 'vitalism' is actually configurable as an anti-natural process. The reflection is more specifically perfected in the *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*. Here, Leopardi asserts that

> quello che furono gli antichi, siamo stati noi tutti, e quello che fu il mondo per qualche secolo, siamo stati noi per qualche anno, dico fanciulli e partecipi di quella ignoranza e di quei timori e di quei diletti e di quelle credenze e di quella sterminata operazione della fantasia; quando il tuono e il vento e il sole e gli astri e gli animali e le piante e le mura de' nostri alberghi, ogni cosa ci apparviva o amica o nemica nostra, indifferente nessuna, insensata nessuna; quando

[316] The reference is of course to Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962).

ciascun oggetto che vedevamo ci pareva che in certo modo accennando, quais mostrasse di volerci favellare; quando in nessun luogo soli, interrogavamo le immagini e le pareti e gli alberi e i fiori e le nuvole, e abbracciavamo sassi e legni, e quasi ingiuriati malmenavamo e quasi benefiziati carezzavamo cose incapaci d'ingiuria e di benefizio […].[317]

The assimilation of individual childhood and antiquity as the 'infancy of humanity' is a relatively ancient *topos*. It is however interesting to remark how Leopardi's statement shows singular proximities with a text written a hundred years later, namely Freud's essay on *The Uncanny* (*Das Unheimliche*, 1919). Freud's text establishes a close connection between childhood omnipotence and magical-supernatural beliefs of 'primitive' populations: the uncanny comes to the fore when the adult and rational subject encounters something 'that ought to have remained … secret and hidden but has come to light',[318] being either a residual of childhood impressions (ontogenesis) or the survival of mythical-superstitious beliefs inherited from the 'infancy of humanity' (phylogenesis). The ambiguity between ontogenesis and phylogenesis remains unresolved in Freud's text. The two possibilities are superimposed one upon the other, making it impossible to draw a clear distinction between individual and collective memory:

We – or our primitive forefathers – once believed that these possibilities were realities, and were convinced that they actually happened. Nowadays we no longer believe in them, we have *surmounted* (*überwunden*) these modes of thought; but we do not feel quite sure of our new beliefs, and the old ones still exist within us (*die alten leben noch in uns fort*) ready to seize upon any confirmation. As soon as something *actually happens* in our lives which seems to confirm the old, discarded (*abgelegten*) beliefs we get a feeling of the uncanny.[319]

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[317] Leopardi, *Discorso di un italiano intorno alla poesia romantica*, pp. 85-86.
[318] Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. by James Strachey, 24 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953-74), vol. XVII, p. 224. Further quotations from Freud will be indicated by *SE*, followed by volume and page numbers.
[319] *SE*, XVII, pp. 247-48. On the uncanny see also Graziella Berto, *Freud, Heidegger: Lo spaesamento* (Milan: Bompiani, 1999) and Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003).

In the same way as Leopardi's *Discorso di un italiano* maintains the substantial kinship of children and 'ancients' through the common example of the act of communicating with inanimate object, in his essay on *The Uncanny* Freud relies on a consideration made by Ernst Jentsch and evokes the notion of animism. From this perspective, the most emblematic example of uncanniness is, for Freud, the uncertainty '"whether an apparently animate being is really alive; or conversely, whether a lifeless object might not be in fact animate" [Zweifel an der Beseelung eines anscheinend lebendigen Wesens und umgekehrt darüber, ob ein lebloser Gegenstand nicht etwa beseelt sei]', and more specifically 'the impression made by waxwork figures, ingeniously constructed dolls and automata [Wachsfiguren, kunstvollen Puppen und Automaten]'.[320] Moreover, the essay on the uncanny contains the same deliberate superimposition of the ontogenetic and phylogenetic spheres as Leopardi's, as well as the same assimilation between children and 'primitive men'. Freud in fact connects the definition of 'omnipotence of thoughts' that he had coined for the case of the 'Rat-Man' with the religious beliefs of animism:

> These last examples of the uncanny are to be referred to the principle which I have called 'omnipotence of thoughts', taking the name from an expression used by one of my patients. And now we find ourselves on familiar ground. Our analysis of instances of the uncanny has led us back to the old, animistic conception of the universe. This was characterized by the idea that the world was peopled with the spirits of human beings; by the subject's narcissistic overevaluation of his own mental processes; by the belief in the omnipotence of thoughts and the technique of magic based on that belief; by the attribution to various outside persons and things of carefully graded magical powers, or '*mana*'; as well as by all the other creations with help of which man, in the unrestricted narcissism of that stage of development, strove to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality. It seems as if each one of us has been passing through a phase of individual development corresponding to this animistic stage in primitive men, that none of us has passed through it without preserving certain residues and traces of it which are still capable of manifesting themselves, and that everything which now strikes us as

[320] Ibid., p. 226. For the curious case of a 'kunstvolle Puppe' connected to Leopardi see Mario Andrea Rigoni, 'Un Elzeviro. Opere d'arte per amori mancati', in *Giacomo Leopardi. Viaggio nella Memoria*, ed by Fabiana Cacciapuoti (Milan: Electa, 1999), pp. 147-48.

'uncanny' fulfils the condition of touching those residues of animistic mental activity within us and bringing them to expression.[321]

The possibility of reading 'Le Ricordanze' through Freud's *The Uncanny* can be confirmed by considering a crucial element of the poem. As we have seen, 'Le Ricordanze' articulates a two-fold meaning of return: the return to a mythical-mythological way of seeing the world and of speaking with inanimate objects, and the *nostos* to a physical space which is transfigured in a mythical way (as Gilberto Lonardi has shown, by speaking of an intertextual memory of Achilles's dialogue with his mother Thetis in the *Iliad*, mediated by Vincenzo Monti's translation).[322] In both cases, we have a 'return home', namely to places that were once familiar, and, more in general, to the sphere of the customary and the habitual ('tornare ancor per uso').

As Luigi Blasucci writes, 'al di là di ogni disegno logico o cronologico, l'avvicendarsi delle lasse riflette lo stesso ondeggiamento interiore dell'io poetante': 'Le Ricordanze' is 'una successione di 'respiri' in cui sembra realizzarsi l'idea di una poesia come traduzione sensibile del 'tempo dell'anima''.[323]Still, even if the flow of loose hendecasyllables aims to highlight the rhapsodical movement of thought, incorporating the dancing movement of bundled memories, one of the motifs emerging from the text is precisely one of places

[321]*SE*, XVII, pp. 240-41.

[322] Gilberto Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero. L''Iliade', Saffo: antichissimi di Leopardi* (Venice: Marsilio, 2005), pp. 13-14: 'Questo canto è una poesia del *ritorno* ai luoghi primi, ai luoghi *usati*. […] per il *ritorno*,e per la sua meta – il *paterno giardino* –, propongo al lettore di non dimenticare *Iliade* 18, 115ss., nella versione di Vincenzo Monti: "[…] che alle tue braccia nel *paterno* tetto/non *tornerà* più mai….". È Achille che parla a Teti, sua madre, e prevede, nel pathos del *nevermore*, che non tornerà alla casa del padre, di Peleo. […] E interviene un altro dato intertestuale, il fatto che Leopardi è sempre attento a *chi* si muove, di volta in volta, nell'*Iliade*, sulla scena. Nel caso, "il migliore degli Achei", Achille. Il quale lo fa con quella delicatezza […] che un Hölderlin più generalmente riconobbe al personaggio, "so stark und zart", "così forte e delicato"'. My reading does not necessarily presuppose Monti's translation: the Greek text (*Iliad* XVIII, 90) speaks of 'house' and of 'return' (*òikade nostēsant'*).

[323]Blasucci, 'I tempi dei "Canti"', p. 203.

(‘luoghi’, l. 137), being at the same time physical *loci* and *loci memoriæ* around which recollection is thickened. The overview of the palace starts from the garden (‘sul paterno giardino’, l. 3) and the windows (‘dalle finestre/di questo albergo’, l. 4-5) and then moves to the ‘voci alterne’ (l. 18) coming from beneath; it widens towards the horizon, ‘la vista/di quel lontano mar, quei monti azzurri’ (l. 20-21), before returning to the ‘buia stanza’ (l. 53) from which one hears ‘il suon dell’ora/dalla torre del borgo’ (l. 50-51). It enters the house, ‘quella loggia colà’ (l. 61), ‘queste dipinte mura,/quei figurati armenti, e il Sol che nasce/su romita campagna’ (l. 62-64); it follows ‘queste sale antiche’ (l. 67) and walks alongside ‘queste/ampie finestre’ (l. 68-69); and eventually points ‘colà […] la fontana’ (l. 107) by recalling fantasies of suicide, before turning to Nerina’s places, the ‘colli’ (l. 151), ‘ogni fiorita/piaggia’ (l. 166-67) and the window now ‘deserta’ (l. 144), for which Giovanni Battista Bronzini presupposed the influence of a sad, popular *strambotto*.[324]

Passo e ripasso e la finestra è chiusa;
non ce la vedo più l’innamorata,
non ce la vedo più come era prima;
quella che cerchi è morta e sotterrata.[325]

The ‘ricordanze’ are therefore connected to the ‘house’: this term is to be intended in the widest possible sense, namely as the familiar place connected to infancy and origin (what Lonardi calls the ‘luoghi primi’) expressed in German by the word *Heim*. *Heim* is actually more than a physical space: it is essentially an affective perimeter, the field of ‘homeliness’,

[324]The image of the window is one of the strongest *Pathosformeln* in Leopardi’s text, as is clear in *A Silvia*, and also in one of the popular songs transcribed in the *Zibaldone* in April 1820 (‘Fàcciate alla finestra, Luciola,/Decco che passa lo ragazzo tua’, *Zib*. 29). On the window as a ‘Leopardian icon’ see Franco Ferrucci, *Il formidabile deserto. Lettura di Giacomo Leopardi* (Rome : Fazi, 1998), pp. 94-96.

[325] Giovanni Battista Bronzini, *Leopardi e la poesia popolare dell'Ottocento* (Naples: De Simone, 1975), p. 92.

the place where the Ego feels 'at home'. As Anthony Vidler writes, 'the word *heimlich* is […] linked to domesticity (*Häuslichkeit*), to being at home (*heimatlich*) or being neighborly (*freundnachbarlich*)'.[326] In the course of his seminar on anxiety of 1962-63, while commenting on Freud's essay on the uncanny, Jacques Lacan remarked that 'si ce mot [*Heim*] a un sens dans l'expérience humaine, que c'est là la maison de l'homme. Donnez à ce mot de maison toutes les résonances que vous voudrez, y compris astrologiques'.[327] Most of all, the *Heim* is constructed as a familiar place precisely insofar as it is invested with memory. To speak in Leopardi's terms, the *Heim* is the place 'ove non è cosa/Ch'io vegga o senta, onde un'immagin dentro/non torni, e un dolce rimembrar non sorga' (l. 55-57), a setting where every sign denotes a specific meaning, according to an established semiotic code.[328]

In answering Breme in the *Zibaldone*, Leopardi tries to enumerate the elements forming a hypothetical 'sentimental landscape': 'la campana del luogo natio, (così dic[e Breme]) e io aggiungo la vista di una campagna, di una torre diroccata ec. ec.' (*Zib.* 15). What Leopardi is actually asserting is that what excites feeling is nature 'purissima, tal qual'è, tal quale la vedevano gli antichi', 'per propria forza insita in lei, e non tolta in prestito da nessuna cosa' (*Zib.* 15-16). If the adjective 'natio' (which could be perfectly translated as *Heimlich*) surreptitiously introduces the shadow of a subjective recollection, it is worth remarking how Leopardi's addition – which is completely pleonastic (and hence far more important from the angle of unconscious memory) – takes as examples precisely such pivotal elements of Leopardi's imagery as the 'tower' and the 'country'. The tower had been constructed as a

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[326] Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1992), p. 24.
[327] Jacques Lacan, *Le Séminaire. Livre X: L'angoisse (1962-1963)*, ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 2004), p. 60.
[328] For the concept of 'semiotic code', see Umberto Eco, *Trattato di semiotica generale* (Milan: Bompiani, 1975), pp. 53-57 and 71-200, and Id., *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 255-58.

typical icon of the eighteenth-century sublime through Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime* (1757).[329] The two terms appear however as strictly related in Leopardi's oeuvre, always in connection with the semantic areas of 'vagueness' and 'indefiniteness': from the '*torre*/In solitario *campo*' of 'Il Pensiero dominante' (l. 18-19, emphasis mine) to the initial couplet of 'Il Passero solitario' ('D'insu la vetta della *torre* antica,/Passero solitario, alla *campagna*', emphasis mine),[330] and including several passages of the *Zibaldone*.[331]

Indeed, as Freud maintains, the uncanny (*Unheimliche*) is rooted precisely in the sphere of *Heimlichkeit*: the uncanny is the form of anxiety that becomes manifest in the field of homeliness, either when something homely presents itself in a slightly distorted shape or when something extraneous and defamiliarizing penetrates the 'homely' space of the 'house of the Ego'. It is interesting to remark, I think, how when speaking of the 'Ricordanze' Alberto Folin seems to re-echo Freud's definition of the uncanny as 'something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through

[329] See Gaetano, *Giacomo Leopardi e il sublime*, p. 319.
[330] On these lines see Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero*, pp. 46-48.
[331] See for example *Zib.* 171 (12-23 July 1820): 'Perciò [la curiosità] potrà esser la cagione immediata di questo effetto,~~ma non la primaria~~ (vale a dire che se l'anima non provasse piacere nella vista della *campagna* ec. non desidererebbe l'estensione di questa vista), ma non la primaria […] L'anima s'immagina quello che non vede, che quell'albero, quella siepe, quella *torre* gli nasconde, e va errando in uno spazio immaginario'; 1429-30 (1 August 1821): 'è notabile che l'anima in una delle dette estasi, vedendo p.e. una *torre* moderna, ma che non sappia quando fabbricata, e un'altra antica della quale sappia l'epoca precisa, tuttavia è molto più commossa da questa che da quella. […] Come allorchè vediamo una vasta *campagna*, di cui pur da tutte le parti si scuopra l'orizzonte'; 1430-31 (1 August 1821): 'richiamar l'idea di una *campagna* arditamente declive in guisa che la vista in certa lontananza non arrivi alla valle […] Una fabbrica una *torre* ec. veduta in modo che ella paia innalzarsi sola sopra l'orizzonte, e questo non si veda, produce un contrasto efficacissimo e sublimissimo tra il finito e l'indefinito ec. ec. ec.'; 4418 (30 November 1828): 'All'uomo sensibile e immaginoso, che viva, come io sono vissuto gran tempo, sentendo di continuo ed immaginando, il mondo e gli oggetti sono in certo modo doppi. Egli vedrà cogli occhi una *torre*, una *campagna*; udrà cogli orecchi un suono d'una campana; e nel tempo stesso~~vedrà~~ coll'immaginazione vedrà un'altra *torre*, un'altra *campagna*, udrà un altro suono' (emphasis mine throughout).

the process of repression [etwas dem Seelenleben von alters her Vertrautes, das ihm nur durch den Prozeß der Verdrängung entfremdet worden ist]'.[332] 'a ben guardare […] l'appellativo ["vaghe stelle dell'Orsa"] suona, più che come un'invocazione, come un riconoscimento di qualcuno che è stato un tempo familiare, e che – come tale – inaspettatamente si ripresenta invitando al saluto'.[333] The feeling engendered by this unforeseen return – a joy grounded in surprise – is surely different from the vague disease caused by the experience of the uncanny. Still, the tension between familiarity and unexpectedness is symptomatically analogous, grounding the feeling that gives rise to poetic speech in the unpredicted return of an animistic frame of mind, in which the spheres of ontogenesis and phylogenesis are inextricably interfaced. In the next chapter I will discuss the possibility of using the notion of the 'uncanny' to interpret some aspects of the 'Ricordanze' and of Leopardi's thought and poetry as a whole.

[332] *SE*, XVII, p. 241.
[333] Folin, *Leopardi e il canto dell'addio*, p. 96.

CHAPTER 2

THE TERRORS OF THE NIGHT

In being an aesthetic experience grounded in a tension between homeliness and unhomeliness, as well as between proximity and distance, the uncanny appears as a potentially useful notion in analysing some features of Leopardi's thought: if the poetic of 'vagueness' and 'indefiniteness' itself is articulated in a shift between familiarity and non-familiarity, then the discussion led by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone* about concepts such as those of grace and the sublime, as we have seen, seems to situate aesthetical enjoyment in a liminal zone between pleasure and pathos, thus individuating the poetic effect in practices of distantiation within the familiar or in a search for familiarity in otherness.

On the one hand, Leopardi actually seems to evaluate a form of oblique perception, the only one that could grant the experience of an aesthetic shudder. The 'sempre caro […] ermo colle' of the 'Infinito' is a familiar space in which the bench becomes the vehicle for a conjuration of alterity. Blasucci quotes Noferi in stating how 'l'ostacolo che "nasconde" il viso [in "Alla sua Donna"] *ha* la stessa funzione, scatenante dell'immaginazione, della siepe'.[334] In the 'Infinito', adds Lonardi, Leopardi 'convert[e] e mescol[a] […] lo *spavento* e il *terribile* […] con la sua irradiazione di sublime, al *familiare*. Lo trapiant[a] nella *familiarità* stessa degli oggetti che, cara […] agli antichi, è anche a lui cara'.[335] The operation pursued in 'L'Infinito' has antecedents in the *Zibaldone,* for example in *Zib.* 36 (1818), where we find an image that Leopardi later re-elaborates in the 'Ricordanze':

[334]Blasucci, 'Petrarchismo e platonismo nella canzone "Alla sua Donna"', p. 67n.
[335] Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero*, pp. 71-72.

Sento dal mio letto suonare (battere) l'orologio della torre. Rimembranze di quelle notti estive nelle quali essendo fanciullo e lasciato in letto in camera oscura, chiuse le sole persiane, tra la paura e il coraggio sentiva battere un tale orologio. Oppure situazione trasportata alla profondità della notte, o al mattino.

In September 1821 this reflection is more closely developed:

Da quella parte della mia teoria del piacere dove si mostra come degli oggetti veduti per metà, o con certi impedimenti ec. ci destino idee indefinite, si spiega perchè piaccia la luce del sole o della luna, veduta in luogo dov'essi non si vedano e non si scopra la sorgente della luce; un luogo solamente in parte illuminato da essa luce; il riflesso di detta luce, e i vari effetti materiali che ne derivano; il penetrare di detta luce in luoghi dov'ella divenga incerta e impedita, e non bene si distingua, come attraverso un canneto, in una selva, per li balconi socchiusi ec. ec.; la detta luce veduta in luogo oggetto ec. dov'ella non entri e non percota dirittamente, ma vi sia ribattuta e diffusa da qualche altro luogo od oggetto ec. dov'ella venga a battere; in un andito veduto al di dentro o al di fuori, e in una loggia parimente ec. quei luoghi dove la luce si confonde ec. ec. colle ombre, come sotto un portico, in una loggia elevata e pensile, fra le rupi e i burroni, in una valle, sui colli veduti dalla parte dell'ombra, in modo che ne sieno indorate le cime; il riflesso che produce p.e. un vetro colorato su quegli oggetti su cui si riflettono i raggi che passano per detto vetro; tutti quegli oggetti in somma che per diversemateriali e menome circostanze giungono alla nostra vista, udito ec. in modo incerto, mal distinto, imperfetto, incompleto, o fuor dell'ordinario ec. (*Zib.* 1744-45, 20 September 1821)

On the other hand, in the letter sent by Leopardi to his sister from Pisa on 25 February 1828, only the transfiguration of an un-familiar space into a familiar one can allow the experience of recollection and poetry-making:

Io sogno sempre di voi altri, dormendo e vegliando: ho qui in Pisa una certa strada deliziosa, che io chiamo *Via delle rimembranze*: là vo a passeggiare quando voglio sognare a occhi aperti. Vi assicuro che in materia d'immaginazioni, mi pare di esser tornato al mio buon tempo antico (25 febbraio 1828).[336]

[336] *E*, vol. II, p. 1459.

The same tension seems to be fully articulated in the 'Ricordanze', literally shaping the structure of the poem in a subterranean and intimate way. In defining the uncanny, Freud borrows a quotation from Schelling: 'everything is *unheimlich* that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light [alles, was ein Geheimnis, im Verborgenen bleiben sollte und hervorgetreten ist]'.[337] This definition is definitely flexible, and actually opens several possibilities of interpretation. Freud's text itself seems to follow two separate lines of analysis that determine the peculiar ambiguity – and the charming newness – of his essay. On the one hand, the uncanny works on an individual scale, as the return of a repressed memory belonging to childhood: the feeling of *déjà vu*, for example, would be the unconscious recollection of 'the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning. […] In this case […] the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, familiar; the prefix '*un*' ['un-'] is the token of repression'.[338] On the other hand, the process of repression is projected on a cultural scale,[339] a path of inquiry that – moving on from Freud's essay – is developed with great finesse by Michel de Certeau:[340] 'an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolises, and so on', namely when the 'civilised' culture of modernity finds itself trapped in a magical and mythical frame of thought.[341] Indeed, this ambiguity can certainly be projected onto Leopardi's 'Ricordanze': 'ancient' beliefs (either in the form of

[337] *SE*, XVII, p. 225.
[338] Ibid., p. 245.
[339] On this possibility offered by Freud's essay see Francesco Orlando, *Illuminismo, barocco e retorica freudiana* (Turin: Einaudi, 1997), pp. 15-26.
[340] See Michel de Certeau, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 337-419 and Id., *Histoire et psychanalyse entre science et fiction* (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).
[341] *SE*, XVII, p. 244,

childhood memories or of the illusions of the 'ancients') undergo a process of burial, and their return engenders a feeling of wonder and surprise ('io non credea') that produces a both personal and universal, inner and historical meditation. Leopardi's ambiguity is the same as Freud's, most of all because their respective cultural backgrounds are rooted in the Enlightenment. By this term, I do not mean to evoke the monolithical construction hypothesised by, for instance, Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), but rather to speak of a critical modality of analysis directed against 'errors' retraced in tradition, which is precisely the cultural perspective from which the young Leopardi operates while writing the *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi*:

> [questa operetta] non è inutile, benché non abbia per oggetto che i *pregiudizi degli antichi* […]. Per renderla ancor più profittevole, ho cercato spesso […] di *paragonare gli antichi coi moderni*, e di far vedere che taluno degli errori, dei quali avea parlato, *sussisteva tuttora nel popolo*. […] Uno degli oggetti che si sono proposti alcuni tra quelli che hanno scritto degli errori popolari, è stato quello di confutarli. Scrivendo *in un secolo illuminato* ho creduto quasi inutile il farlo. Nondimeno, *poiché molti degli errori communi una volta agli antichi non sono ancora distrutti*, ho stimato bene di far parola di tratto in tratto anche di quegli scrittori antichi, che hanno condannata qualche falsa opinione, adottata generalmente nel loro secolo. (emphasis mine)[342]

As Francesco Orlando highlights, this perspective is exactly the same to that from which Freud's essay on the uncanny is structured: 'nell'esempio più esplicito che Freud stesso ci abbia mai fornito di estrapolazione del modello formale, dalla rimozione a qualcos'altro,

[342] *TPP*, p. 873. On the model of critique see Lorenzo Bianchi, 'Critica e libero pensiero', in *Illuminismo. Un vademecum*, ed. by Gianni Paganini and Edoardo Tortarolo (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008), pp. 88-102. On Leopardi's *Saggio* and the culture of European Enlightenment see especially Rolando Damiani, 'Le "credenze stolte". Leopardi e gli errori popolari', in Id., *L'impero della ragione. Studi leopardiani* (Ravenna: Longo, 1994), pp. 7-55 and Arturo Mazzarella, *I dolci inganni. Leopardi, gli errori e le illusioni* (Naples: Liguori, 1996).

questo qualcos'altro non è dunque che il superamento razionale di credenze arcaiche, cioè precisamente il processo dell'illuminismo'.[343]

If we return to the quotation from Schelling, we should acknowledge therefore that what 'ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' denotes both an autobiographical memory connected to infancy and a semantic-anthropological memory connected to the 'infancy of humanity'. As we have seen, both in Leopardi and in Freud we witness the same ambiguity: the individual 'spirito' that 'ha percorso lo stesso stadio che lo spirito umano in generale' (*Zib.* 143, 1 July 1820), embodies the very same duplicity that we find in *The Uncanny*. The feeling of the uncanny arises from the sudden and disturbing encounter with something 'past', which the adulthood of a subject who has become a 'philosopher' – or a culture which that philosophy has enlightened – have buried.

The uncanny – as the return of a mythological frame of mind – can therefore be defined as the return of a mistake, of an incorrect belief that contrasts with a (collective and individual) cultural maturity. It is useful to remark how this is precisely the Leopardian acceptation of the Greek notion of *mythos*. Carlo Ginzburg has shown in detail how the word *mythos* is often connoted, in the Western tradition, by the sense of the 'fable' as an 'untrue' discourse.[344] This analysis was however already developed by Leopardi in the *Zibaldone*, where he echoes themes from Vico's *Scienza nuova*.[345] In Leopardi, the terms 'mito' and 'favola' are often confused and superimposed, as in the poem 'Alla Primavera, o delle Favole antiche' (1822) or in the 1827 index to the *Zibaldone*, where the entry 'Favole' addresses 'Mitologie'. Already in January 1821, however, Leopardi pointed out in the *Zibaldone* how

[343] Orlando, *Illuminismo, barocco e retorica freudiana*, p. 16. On the Enlightenment roots of Freud's cultural operation see Yamina Oudai Celso, *Freud e la filosofia antica. Genealogia di un fondatore* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2006), pp. 37-39.
[344]Carlo Ginzburg, 'Mito', in *I Greci. Storia Cultura Arte Società*, ed. by Salvatore Settis (Turin: Einaudi, 1996), vol. I, pp. 197-237.
[345] See Lucio Felici, *L'Olimpo abbandonato,* pp. 69-71.

l'~~x~~antico e il primitivo significato di fabula, non era~~fabul~~favola, ma~~x~~discorso, da for faris, ~~quasi~~quasi piccolo discorso, onde poi si trasferì al significato di ciancia, nugae, e finalmente di finzionee racconto falso. Appunto come il greco *mŷthos* nel suo significato proprio, valeva lo stesso che *lógos*, […] e da Omero non si trova, cred'io, adoperato se non in questa o simili significazioni […]. Poi fu trasferito alla significazione di favola. (*Zib.* 497-98, 13 January1821)

We therefore witness a semantic constellation in which the notions of 'mito', 'favola', 'errore', 'pregiudizio', 'falsità' and 'illusione' undergo a meaningful process of interchangeability. In Leopardi, the 'illusion' is always intrinsically – and even etymologically – a 'myth', which partially explains why Leopardi makes use of myths in a very personal way,[346] always excluding 'eventuali mitologemi […] che possono costituire interessanti chiavi d'interpretazione per alcune poesie'.[347] This happens, for instance, in 'Alla sua Donna', where Cesare Galimberti has retraced a subterranean Gnostic shadow between the lines of an *excusatio non petita*.[348] Often, a mythical element resurfaces beneath a *lapsus calami* or in the form of an unperceivable intertextual echo, which makes it difficult to identify its actual intention. For example, while elaborating his own 'sistema di belle arti' in the first pages of the *Zibaldone,* Leopardi proposes a terminological triad ('Passioni morti tempeste ec. piacciono egregiamente benchè sian brutte per questo solo che son bene imitate', *Zib.* 2) that structurally echoes a passage from the *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi*: 'la voluttà, la libidine, il pallore, la febbre, la tempesta, ebbero tempii ed incensi'.[349] 'Volontà' and 'libidine' are subsumed under the general term 'passioni', the illness ('febbre') directly turns to 'morti', while the 'tempesta' becomes plural while remaining unaltered. The

[346] Ibid., p. 17.
[347] Ibid., p. 27n.
[348] Cesare Galimberti, 'Un mot sous les mots nella "Canzone alla sua Donna"?', in Id., *Cose che non son cose. Saggi su Leopardi* (Venice: Marsilio, 2001), pp. 87-97.
[349] *TPP*, p. 874.

echo between the two passages, although probably unconscious, confirms how the 'favole antiche', retraced in the wide corpus of the classical irrational, are assimilated as literary expedients, thus confirming their common nature as illusions. If 'myth', for Leopardi, is the frame of mind that everybody shares in childhood, and into which one can fall again through the momentary suspension of disbelief granted by art or by a certain disposition to fantasy (as is the case at the beginning of the 'Ricordanze'), then the 'semantic memory' of the 'favole antiche' and the autobiographical memory of infantile illusions happen to collide and interact.

These considerations may help us to better understand the memorial short-circuit that opens the *Zibaldone*. The first page of the 'scartafaccio', writes Fabiana Cacciapuoti, is 'formata da diversi materiali, e […] presenta scritture di momenti differenti: in questa pagina compare la scelta e l'indecisione, il gioco della nota e della memoria, unito a una tensione progettuale ancora ignara di se stessa'.[350] Structured as a palimpsest, the page appears therefore as the visible emblem of an archaeology of the self, emerging through the superimposition of fragments belonging to different times and characterised by remarkable calligraphic differences.[351]

As Cacciapuoti summarises, '[t]re sono i brani scritti con inchiostro e strumenti differenti: a) "Palazzo bello. Cane di notte dal casolare, al passar del viandante"; b) i versi che cominciano "Era la luna nel cortile"; c) il brano che inizia "Onde Aviano"'.[352] This last passage is the very first intertextual relationship engendered by the text of the *Zibaldone*. Technically an incomplete paraphrase (without any bibliographical reference), it refers to a fable by the Latin author Avianus that Leopardi may well have read in an edition published in

[350] Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone*', p. 48.
[351] 'Qui la scrittura risale a epoche diverse, molto lontane l'una dall'altra: la differenza degli inchiostri utilizzati, i numerosi strumenti scelti per scrivere, l'introduzione di qualche brano *a posteriori* nello spazio limitato dei margini o delle interlinee testimoniano che questa pagina ha avuto una funzione importante per la storia del testo', ibid., p. 48.
[352] Ibid., pp. 48-49.

Padua in 1721, and which he had already quoted in the eight chapter of the *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi*:

> Nella prima favola di Aviano si legge quel distico:
> Rustica deflenti puero iraverat olim,
> Ni taceat, rabido quod foret esca lupo.
> Non sembra egli di ravvisare nei costumi degli antichi il ritratto dei nostri? Qual dolore per il saggio di vedere che sì antichi sono gli abusi, e che il tempo, che fa tanti danni alla società distruggendo ciò che potrebbe esserle utile, non le ha nemmeno reso il servigio di annientare ciò che è nocivo![353]

Avianus's fable is therefore one of those cases in which 'taluno degli errori, dei quali avea parlato, sussisteva tuttora nel popolo',[354] and the 'secolo illuminato' reveals itself to be closer to antiquity than it could seem at a first glance. The ancients, writes Leopardi in the *Saggio*,

> Così paurosi come erano essi stessi, e così carichi di superstizione e di follie, non arrossivano […] di atterrir per giuoco i fanciulli con racconti orribili o con figure spaventose. La favola della Lamia o della Strige era sempre in bocca delle balie di quei tempi. Quando i fanciulli stentavano a prender sonno, esse li trattenevano colle novelle delle torri della Lamia o dei pettini del Sole, come vedesi in Tertulliano. Opportunissimo veramente per intimorire i fanciulli era il momento in cui questi già coricati si preparavano a dormire, affinché la impressione, che avrebbe fatta sui loro animi la novella udita dalla nutrice, col favor delle tenebre, del silenzio e dei sogni venisse ad accrescersi, a ingigantirsi e a divenir quasi indelebile.[355]

The impression that the habits of the ancients and of the moderns show manifest affinities can be supported by recalling the already quoted passages of the *Zibaldone* and the 'Ricordanze' in which we fitness the analogous image of a terrified child in a dark room:

> Sento dal mio letto suonare (battere) l'orologio della torre. Rimembranze di quelle *notti* estive nelle quali *essendo fanciullo* e lasciato in letto *in camera oscura,* chiuse le sole persiane, *tra*

[353] *TPP*, p. 895.
[354] *TPP*, p. 873.
[355] *TPP*, p. 895.

la paura e il coraggio sentiva battere un tale orologio. Oppure *situazione trasportata alla profondità della notte*, o al mattino […] (*Zib.* 36, emphasis mine)

Viene il vento recando il suon dell'ora
dalla torre del borgo. Era *conforto*
questo suon, mi rimembra, alle mie *notti*,
quando *fanciullo, nella buia stanza*,
per assidui terrori io vigilava,
sospirando il mattin. (l. 50-55, emphasis mine)

The position itself of this story in both works – at the end of the eight chapter in the *Saggio*, and on the very first page of the *Zibaldone* – suggests that it performs a specific role within Leopardi's subterranean strategies of composition. This hypothesis can be confirmed by the peculiar status of the paraphrase from Avianus in both works. The fable was originally a humorous apologue: it depicts a gullible wolf who believes that the woman will act on her threats to throw her child to him, and so patiently waits to be brought this meal. Both in the *Saggio* and in the *Zibaldone*, however, Leopardi quotes the fable only for what concerns the menace intended by the nurse to the child: while the original apologue was mainly focused on the *bon mot* made by the wolf at the end of the story, in both the *Saggio* and the *Zibaldone* Leopardi systematically elides this aspect of the story, leaving only the countrywoman's menacing behaviour, and using it to epitomise those 'night terrors' in which the 'ancients' believed, to which peasants continue to refer due to their superstitions, and which still scare children in the fullest age of human reason: 'Non sembra egli di ravvisare nei costumi degli antichi il ritratto dei nostri?'.[356] If this is fully understandable within the context of the *Saggio* (given that only the quoted passage is relevant to the topic), this definitely appears odd in the *Zibaldone*, where Leopardi quickly liquidates the rest of the tale: 'E fatto tardi, tornato alla moglie senza preda perchè s'era baloccato ad aspettare fino a sera, disse quello che nell'autore

[356]*TPP*, p. 895.

puoi vedere' (*Zib.* 1). The question is therefore why Avianus's fable is inserted in the *Zibaldone*, and with what aim. A detailed analysis of the first page can be helpful in explaining this:

Palazzo bello. Cane di notte dal casolare, al passar del viandante.
Era la luna nel cortile, un lato
Tutto ne illuminava, e discendea
Sopra il contiguo lato obliquo un raggio...
Nella (dalla) maestra via s'udiva il carro
Del passegger, che stritolando i sassi,
Mandava un suon, cui precedea da lungi
Il tintinnìo de' mobili sonagli.
Onde Aviano raccontando una favoletta dice che una donna di contado piangendo un suo bambolo, minacciogli se non taceva che l'avrebbe dato mangiare a un lupo. E che un lupo che a caso di là passava, udendo dir questo alla donna credettele che dicesse vero, e messosi innanzi all'uscio di casa così stette quivi tutto quel giorno ad aspettare che la donna gli portasse quella vivanda. Come poi vi stesse tutto quel tempo e la don~~n~~na non se n'accorgesse e non n'avesse paura e non gli facesse motto con sasso o altro, Aviano lo saprà che lo dice. E aggiugne che il lupo non ebbe niente perchè il fanciullo s'addormentò, e quando bene non l'avesse fatto non ci sarìa stato pericolo. E fatto tardi, tornato alla moglie senza preda perchè s'era baloccato ad aspettare fino a sera, disse quello che nell'autore puoi vedere. (*Zib.* 1, July/August 1817)

The relationship between these three textual units has always seemed enigmatic, and criticism has in fact more or less always tended to dissolve it. The connection between the first and the second fragments is generally accepted, given the clear thematic association between the two: they would both form the initial subject matter of a nocturnal idyll, taking place between 'Palazzo bello' and the main road, and focusing on the dog, the 'viandante'/'passegger' and the moon.[357] The connection with the third fragment is, however, far more problematic, most of all because of the puzzling adverb 'onde',[358] so perplexing that,

[357] Felici, *La luna nel cortile*,p. 24.
[358] As D'Intino writes, it is 'un trapasso che ha sempre lasciato perplessi i critici', *L'immagine della voce,* p. 203.

when first publishing the *Zibaldone* in 1898, editors decided to suppress it,[359] and in 1909 Giulio Augusto Levi argued that it should not be considered as a part of the *Zibaldone* at all.[360] Levi asserted that the paraphrase belonged to a projected rewriting of Leopardi's *Saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi* (1815). 'Onde' would therefore refer back to another text, thereby disconnecting Avianus's fable from the rest of the page, which is still the most widely accepted interpretation: 'il brano che inizia con "Onde Aviano"', writes Fabiana Cacciapuoti, '[…] è un frammento del *Principio di un rifacimento del saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi*, composto nel luglio del 1817', and would therefore be 'parte di un testo più ampio a cui l'autore voleva riferirsi, fatto che giustificherebbe l'inizio con "onde"'.[361]

Surely, a *Principio di un rifacimento del saggio sopra gli errori popolari degli antichi* must have been drafted between 1815 and 1817.[362] It should be noted, however, that this date has actually been surmised from the *Zibaldone*, as well as from a letter to Pietro Giordani of 5 December 1817 in which Leopardi wrote that 'il Luglio passato, la lettura de' trecentisti m'invogliò di scrivere un trattato del quale anni sono avea preparati e ordinati e abbandonati i materiali. Ne scrissi il principio', Leopardi concluded, 'e poi lo lasciai per miglior tempo'.[363] This 'trattato' could certainly have been the rewriting of the *Saggio*, although this hypothesis raises difficulties: it is unlikely that fourteenth-century writers would be connected to an essay on ancient superstitions, and in any case the *Saggio* was definitely more than a mere collection of later abandoned material (although at this stage the manuscript was no longer in Leopardi's possession, since the only copy had unsuccessfully been sent to the Milanese

[359] Cf. Giuseppe Pacella's comments in *Zibaldone*, vol. III, p. 463.
[360] Giulio Augusto Levi, 'Note di cronologia leopardiana', *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, LIII (1909), pp. 232-70.
[361] Cacciapuoti, *Dentro lo 'Zibaldone*', p. 51.
[362] *TPP*, pp. 961-64.
[363] *E*, vol. I, p. 164.

publisher Stella in 1816).[364] The redrafting of the *Saggio* is instead explicitly mentioned several years later in 1826, when Leopardi includes among his future plans a 'Trattatello degli errori popolari degli antichi Greci e Romani'.[365] Most significantly, there is a striking dissonance between the style of the *Zibaldone* paraphrase and that of the *Principio di un rifacimento*: not only does 'onde' appear not to correspond to any passage of the surviving text, but the ironic and colloquial tone of the fragment can hardly be reconciled with the formal, bookish tone of the *Principio*.

In 1990, however, Neuro Bonifazi proposed a comprehensive reading of the page, in which 'onde' was interpreted as logically consequential to the first two fragments.[366] Bonifazi's hypothesis is that 'onde' connected the paraphrase to the description and poetical sketch, with the dog and the wagon's noise inspiring in the countrywoman the idea of the wolf. By depicting a nocturnal scene dominated by the woman's menace, Bonifazi argues, the page alludes to Leopardi's memories of the terrors that he experienced as a child, with the effect that he unconsciously identifies himself with the 'bambolo'. This interpretation is ingenious, and curiously enough precisely this term has been used in order to reject it, first by Pacella ('Personalmente non condivido la ricostruzione del Bonifazi, pur riconoscendone

[364] It should however be said that in fourteenth-century writers 'onde' is often used as an introductory conjunction, like 'item'. The 'trecentisti' may therefore have given Leopardi a stylistic model for reshaping *exempla* taken from the *Saggio* within a new, pastiche-like frame: some linguistic features of the paraphrase (the Tuscanism 'bambolo', the postponement of the pronoun in the verb 'minacciogli') seem to confirm the hypothesis of a 'thirteenth-century' literary pastiche. The idea of using fourteenth-century Italian for rendering the classics is, by the way, certainly present in Leopardi's projects: the thirteenth of the *Disegni letterari* actually includes the idea of an 'Erodoto tradotto in lingua del 300' (*TPP*, p. 1113). I am indebted for this remark to Roberta Cella.

[365] *TPP*, p. 1112.

[366] Neuro Bonifazi, 'La libera traduzione leopardiana di una favola di Aviano nel proemio dello "Zibaldone"', in *La corrispondenza imperfetta. Leopardi tradotto e traduttore*, ed. by Anna Dolfi and Adriana Mitescu (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), pp. 31-39.

l'ingegnosità')[367] and then by Felici ('la tesi troppo ingegnosa − sorretta da una lettura psicoanalitica − di Neuro Bonifazi').[368] More specifically, this rejection has focused on two evident mistakes made by Bonifazi: the definition of the fragments as the 'proemio' of the *Zibaldone*, grounded in a misreading of the *Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno*,[369] and the identification of 'Palazzo bello' with the Leopardi palace, considering that a 'Palazzo bello' actually exists – on the 'maestra via' leading to Recanati – and was, as Pacella notes, 'luogo molto familiare al poeta' (probably, considering what we have said about the uncanny, the only thing that matters).[370] These errors, however, do not affect the main core of Bonifazi's hypothesis: the dismissal of his interpretation, a leitmotif of almost every reading of *Zib.* 1 in the past twenty years, should therefore be read as a symptom of the irreducible anti-Freudianism of Italian literary criticism, recently highlighted by Elio Gioanola.[371]

The two hypotheses – that of a rewriting of the *Saggio* and Bonifazi's – do not appear, I think, as mutually exclusive. The project of a *rifacimento* of the *Saggio* – which testifies at least to a concurrent renewal of interest on Leopardi's behalf in the problem of the ancient irrational – could be seen as reverberating in the *Zibaldone* in relation to the 'cane di notte dal casolare, al passar del viandante' and to the image of the moon outlined in the poetic fragment 'Era la luna nel cortile'. It is actually difficult to avoid remarking how, in the *Saggio*, the correlated images of howling dogs and of the moon – personified by the goddess Hecates – formed a significant part of the eighth chapter, which ended precisely with the quotation from Avianus:

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[367] In *Zibaldone*,vol. III, p. 463.
[368] Felici, *La luna nel cortile*, p. 24.
[369] Ibid., p. 25.
[370] In *Zibaldone*,vol. III, p. 363.
[371] Elio Gioanola, 'Psicanalisi e critica letteraria', in *Freud and Italian Culture*, ed. by Pierluigi Barrotta and Laura Lepschy with Emma Bond (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 9-30, p. 20.

Una maga, presso Teocrito, dice alla luna:
Su via splendid più bella, affin che teco
favellar possa, e con Ecate inferna,
che a' pavidi cagnuoli orrore ispira,
quando di notte, d'atre faci al lume,
va per le tombe degli estinti e il sangue.
[…] Per ammansare la terribile Ecate, se gli davano per cena, dice lo Scoliaste di Teocrito, dei cani ancor teneri, perché giovani, cibo molto gradito al suo palato. […] Volendo dopo cena tornare a casa, prendeano gli antichi dalla mensa un tozzo di pane, e lo recavano seco per preservarsi dai terrori notturni, che potevano sorprenderli nella strada. […] Aggiunge Eustazio che questi errori credevansi cagionati da Ecate. Certamente, come bene osserva Erasmo, la precauzione usata dagli antichi di portar seco del pane nell'andar vagando di notte, era molto opportuna a causa dei cani che infestavano le strade.[372]

The connection between the dogs and the moon appears as a veritable *Pathosformel* in Leopardi's work. As Franco D'Intino writes, 'un "cane" compare nel primo appunto dello *Zibaldone* […], […] in un paesaggio notturno, e associato, come anche quei "cagnuoli" di Teocrito spaventati da "Ecate inferna" […], al terrore degli inferi […], come dimostra la successiva comparsa del "lupo" della favola di Aviano'.[373] '[N]on se può escludere', D'Intino has recently argued, 'che a un livello profondo – per una di quelle associazioni mentali di cui la scrittura leopardiana è così ricca – il lupo di Aviano sia stato evocato dal cane: animale a sua volta protagonista […] dei "terrori notturni" cagionati "nei trivii" da Ecate "infernale" […] Ecate parente stretta di Selene, che illumina la scena poetica leopardiana: *la luna nel cortile*'.[374] The presence of Hecates reverberates further in the *Zibaldone*, as in the case of a fragment of April 1820, where Leopardi speaks of people who 'per la città dai loro letti nelle lor case in mezzo al silenzio della notte si risvegliavano e udivano con ispavento per le strade

[372] *TPP*, p. 894.
[373] In Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, p. 54n.
[374] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, p. 204. See ibid., pp. 203-07, for a poignant analysis of the whole first page of the *Zibaldone.*

il suo orribil pianto' (*Zib.* 106, 15 April 1820). It is here easy to perceive an echo of the *Saggio*'s Hecates:

> Era cosa indegna […] che gli stessi Dei […] passeggiassero di notte e prendessero sollazzo in ispaventar chi dormiva e in molestare chi camminava per le strade […]. Ecate metteva urli e schiamazzava per le strade in un modo infernale. 'Nocturnisque Hecate triviis ululata per urbes', dicea Didone presso Virgilio; ed Apuleio invocando la Luna, 'Regina del cielo', esclamava, 'o tu sii Cerere inclita madre delle messi… o la sorella di Febo… o Proserpina terribile per gli urli notturni'.[375]

The image of the moon and barking dogs also occurs in a letter written to Pietro Giordani on 16 March 1820, which D'Intino correctly links to the *incipit* of the *Zibaldone*:[376]

> Sto anch'io sospirando caldamente la bella primavera come l'unica speranza di medicina che rimanga allo sfinimento dell'animo mio; e poche sere addietro, prima di coricarmi, aperta la finestra della mia stanza, e vedendo un cielo puro e un bel *raggio di luna*, e sentendo un'aria tepida e *certi cani che abbaiavano da lontano*, mi si svegliarono alcune *immagini antiche*, e mi parve di sentire un moto nel cuore, *onde* mi posi a gridare come un forsennato, domandando misericordia alla natura, la cui voce mi pareva di udire dopo tanto tempo. […] E in quel momento dando uno sguardo alla mia condizione passata, […] m'agghiacciai dallo *spavento*, non arrivando a comprendere come si possa tollerare la vita senza illusioni e affetti vivi, e senza immaginazione ed entusiasmo, delle quali cose un anno addietro si componeva tutto il mio tempo (emphasis mine)[377]

What exactly does Leopardi mean by 'immagini antiche'? The adjective 'antico' is remarkably flexible in Leopardi's works. 'Le parole *lontano, antico*, e simili', he writes on 25 September 1821, 'sono poeticissime e piacevoli, perchè destano idee vaste, e indefinite, e non determinabili e confuse' (*Zib.* 1789). This consideration seems to legitimate a semantic extension and to individuate at least two possible readings of the adjective, interwoven in the 'undefined' nature of the signifier.

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[375] *TPP*, p. 894.
[376] In Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, p. 54n.
[377] *E*, vol. I, p. 379.

The first possibility is to read 'antico' as referring to the sphere of history: 'immagini antiche' would then refer to the mythological associations reactivated by the connection between moon and dogs. Moreover, the image of Leopardi crying out to the moon, begging nature for mercy, recalls Lucius's prayer in the eleventh book of Apuleius's *Metamorphoses*, already quoted by Leopardi in the *Saggio*:

> At about the first watch of night I was awakened by a sudden fright (*pavore subito*) and I saw the full orb of the moon gleaming radiantly with splendid sheen [...] Now that fate, it seemed, had taken its fill of my many great misfortunes and was offering, though late (*licet tardam*), a hope of deliverance, I decided to address in prayer the sacred image of the goddess now present in person (*augustum specimen deae praesentis statui deprecari*). 'O Queen of Heaven – whether thou art Ceres [...] or whether thou art heavenly Venus [...] or the sister of Phoebus [...] or whether as Proserpine, dreaded in cries that pierce the night (*nocturnis ululatibus horrenda Proserpina*) [...] whoever thou art, illumining all city walls with that womanly light (*ista luce femminea conlustrans cuncta moenia*) [...] help me now in the depth of my trouble [...] Remove the cruel four-footed form, restore me to the sight of my loved ones, restore me to my own self as Lucius (*redde me meo Lucio*) (XI, 1-2)[378]

The first hours of night, the moon shining on a wall, the 'spavento'-*pavor* and the prayer all seem to suggest an intertextual influence. The goddess worshipped by Lucius is a personification of nature, whom he beseeches to give him back his human shape, invoking her manifold names. In the same way, in the letter, Leopardi contrasts his current, dehumanised nature to a time in the past when he was still able to feel emotions: 'ora […] nessuna passione trova più l'entrata di questa povera anima', and he has become 'stecchito e inaridito come una canna secca'.[379] Like in Apuleius, the act of gazing at the moon-goddess allows a fleeting metamorphosis, suddenly turning into a terrified meditation on the emptiness of the subject's present condition.

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[378] Apuleius of Madauros, *The Isis-Book (Metamorphoses, Book XI*), ed. and transl. by J. Gwyn Griffiths (Leiden: Brill, 1975), pp. 70-73.

[379] *E*, vol. I, p. 379.

This consideration allows another kind of memory to emerge, which suggests another way of interpreting 'immagini antiche': the adjective would refer in this case to an autobiographical or 'episodic memory', strictly interwoven with the 'semantic' memory of classical mythology.[380] In the letter to Giordani the connection between moon and dogs therefore reawakens these dual 'immagini antiche', in which infantile beliefs and classical myth are confused. The superimposition of episodic and semantic memories causes a perception of reality that is anchored in an abstract sphere of origin ('antico') to resurface. The structure of *Zib.* 1 is internally articulated, I argue, via a similar connection: the howling dog, perceived in the nocturnal space illuminated by the moon, produces a memorial short-circuit in which episodic and semantic memory become intertwined, both by association conjuring up the wolf and the terrifying stories of countrywomen. The expression 'immagini antiche' incorporates therefore the undecidability on which the uncanny is articulated, that of early recollection turning into myth, and vice versa: the reminiscence of antiquity – in its widest, fullest acceptation – is activated by places and situations ('palazzo bello' in the *Zibaldone*, the landscape of the 1820 letter, the Leopardi palace in the 'Ricordanze') acting as *loci memoriæ*, *imagines* in which semantic and autobiographical memories are inextricably linked to each other.

Now, the notion of memory as a process of 'thinking through images' is part of the classical and Renaissance tradition of mnemotechnique, which was not unknown to Leopardi himself,[381] and of which we find a powerful example in the 'Ricordanze':

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[380] Endel Tulving, 'Episodic and semantic memory'.

[381] On the history of the 'art of memory' see of course Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1966), Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) and Lina Bolzoni, *La stanza della memoria* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995). On the role of memory in Leopardi see Cacciapuoti, *Giacomo Leopardi. Viaggio nella Memoria*.

Qui non è cosa
Ch'io vegga o senta, onde un'immagin dentro
Non torni, e un dolce rimembrar non sorga.
Dolce per se; ma con dolor sottentra
Il pensier del presente, un van desio
Del passato, ancor tristo, e il dire: io fui.
Quella loggia colà, volta agli estremi
Raggi del dì; queste dipinte mura,
Quei figurati armenti, e il Sol che nasce
Su romita campagna, agli ozi miei
Porser mille diletti allor che al fianco
M'era, parlando, il mio possente errore
Sempre, ov'io fossi. (ll. 55-67)

In this passage, the visual and external images of the 'dipinte mura', the 'figurati armenti' and the image of the Sun are first of all perceived from an inner-standing point: speaking in the terms of Aristotle's *Perì Psychês*, they are *phantasmata*, images situated in the 'heart' of a 'palace of memory' only sporadically and fragmentarily coinciding with the actual one.[382] Here too, the process outlined in Leopardi's text can be assimilated to psychoanalytical conceptualisations: not in the sense of a Freudian reading of Leopardi, but in an acknowledgment of a common background, that of a reflection on the splitting of modern ego. What Leopardi describes is precisely the impasse in which psychoanalytical thought gets trapped, namely the indistinguishability between reality and fantasy (*Phantasie*). This ambiguity has been related to psychoanalysis since its very beginning, and remains

[382] 'Closely linked to the phantasy is the memory, which Aristotle defined as "the possession of a phantasm as icon of what is a phantasm of" (a definition that permits the explanation of abnormal phenomena such as déjà vu and paramnesia). The nexus is so binding that there is no memory without a phantasm, even of things that are objects of intellectual knowledge. The function of the phantasm in the cognitive process is so fundamental that it can in a certain sense be considered the necessary condition of intellection. Aristotle went so far as to say that the intellect is a kind of phantasy (*phantasìa tis*) and several times repeats the principle that, in the scholastic formulation *nihil potest homo intelligere sine phantasmata* (man can under stand nothing without phantasms), will dominate the medieval theory of knowledge', Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 76.

unresolved alongside the whole intellectual development of Freud's:[383] what Freud believed to be unconscious reminiscences of seduction experienced by his hysterical patients in childhood, reveal themselves as pure fantasies, until his famous statement – made in a letter to Wilhelm Fliess of 21 September 1897 – that in the analysis of the unconscious it is impossible to distinguish between truth and emotional fiction ('man die Wahrheit und die mit Affekt besetzte Fiktion nicht unterscheiden kann')'.[384] In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* – writes Graziella Berto – Freud is eventually obliged to acknowledge 'la necessaria improprietà dei concetti e del linguaggio di cui si serve: una *Bildersprache*, che proprio per questo non può rispecchiare l'oggettività delle cose, ma che, nello stesso tempo, non può fare del tutto a meno di crederci, di cadere nell'autoinganno, di dimenticare l'elemento di finzione'.[385]

It is therefore only through the composition of rhetorical figures (*Bildersprache*) that the essential undecidability around which memory is articulated can be rendered, through a texture of tropes that are aimed to render – although in a necessarily imperfect way – the basically pre-linguistic and visual nature of the unconscious. We can hence argue that Leopardi's 'immagin dentro' is not only a mere synonym for 'recollection': 'dentro' certainly refers to 'non torni', but the enjambement projects it obliquely onto 'immagine', thus recalling the notion of 'image in the heart' of classical mnemotechnique, a gnoseological paradigm that – although grounded in Aristotle – reverberates in the Freudian notions of

[383] Berto, *Freud, Heidegger: lo spaesamento*, p. 4.
[384] Sigmund Freud,*Aus den Anfängen der Psychoanalyse. 1887-1902. Briefe an Wilhelm Fließ* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 1962), p. 187. See also Mario Lavagetto, *Freud la letteratura e altro* (Turin: Einaudi, 2001), pp. 82-84.
[385] Berto, *Freud, Heidegger: lo spaesamento*, p. 4.

Szene and *Phantasie*.[386] In an analogous way, in the *Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno*, the mention of painted walls releases a set of free associations that are however by no means sweet, but connected to the almost obsessive themes of duty, parents' expectations and infantile fears:[387] 'Canto dopo le feste; Agnelli sul cielo della stanza, suono delle navi, Gentiloni (otium est pater ec.), Speziali (chierico), dettomi da mio padre ch'io dovea essere un dottore, Paure disciplinazione notturna dei missionari'.[388]

In this passage the two images – the painted and the inner one – coincide: once incorporated in the object by the mediation of Leopardi's *Bildersprache*, the 'ricordanza' reveals the 'illusione' through the metonymy of 'cielo' in the place of 'ceiling' and the synesthesia of the sound of painted ships. Behind these memories, however, there stands terror: in Leopardi's words, the 'paure disciplinazione notturna dei missionari', which are closely related (the adjective 'notturna' is related to 'disciplinazione', but evidently affects 'paure') to the 'assidui terrori' experienced at night and referred to in 'Le Ricordanze'. It is possible that the origin of this passage from the *Silvio Sarno* can be located in the famous passage of the 'bruttacci' referred to in Monaldo Leopardi's *Memoriale* di Monaldo;[389] it is equally possible that the place where the 'confrati' were accommodated was the recently discovered 'night alcove', in which the 'dipinte mura' are covered with symbols connected to

[386] 'If it is true that, in the history of culture, the great innovations are frequently effected departing from elements received from tradition, it is equally true that the "polarization" through which a period affirms its own novelty with respect to the past are, in general, rendered possible by the preexistence, in the bosom of the inheritance transmitted by tradition, as a potential tension, which comes to be reactualized and polarized in the encounter with the new epoch', Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 116.

[387] On childhood fears in Leopardi see Rolando Damiani, *All'apparir del vero. Vita di Giacomo Leopardi* (Milan: Mondadori, 1998), pp. 20-22, Elio Gioanola, *Leopardi, la malinconia* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1995), pp. 144-148 and Id., *Psicanalisi e interpretazione letteraria* (Milan: Jaca Book, 2005), pp. 49-140 and Franco D'Intino, 'I misteri di Silvia', pp. 219-222.

[388] Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, pp. 50-51.

[389] Damiani, *All'apparir del vero*, p.20.

the semantic area of sleep and of the night (a soldier who invites one to silence, a laying lion, an owlet). Most of all, one of the cartouches painted on the wall shows a verse from the Psalms, 'non timebis a timore nocturno' (90, 5), and the echo of this verse – and more in general of this Psalm – is singularly present in Leopardi over the years. The original title of the fragment 'Odi Melisso' is, notably, 'Lo spavento notturno': in the manuscript, Leopardi thus corrects the preceding title 'Il Sogno', so as to suggest a substantial interchangeability between 'dream' and 'nightmare'.[390] The following verse in the Psalm reads '[non timebis] A sagitta volante in die a negotio perambulante in tenebris ab incursu et dæmonio meridiano', where 'perambul[at] in tenebris' may recall the ancient gods mentioned in the *Saggio,* who 'passeggia[vano] di notte e prende[vano] sollazzo in ispaventar chi dormiva', while, in chapter VII, Leopardi explicitly quotes Psalms 90: 'E che cos'altro è il Demonio meridiano mentovato nei Salmi, se non il Demonio che apparisce o infierisce maggiormente nel meriggio?'[391]. The eighth chapter of the *Saggio,* in which Leopardi speaks of Hecates and which ends with the quotation from Avianus, is specifically entitled 'Dei terrori notturni', the very same Biblical expression that echoes throughout Leopardi's oeuvre, until the 'Ricordanze' ('Era conforto/questo suon, mi rimembra, alle mie *notti*,/quando fanciullo, nella buia stanza,/per assidui *terrori* io vigilava', emphasis mine).

With an eloquent consistency, however, Leopardi systematically translates the Bible's *timor* with 'terrore', which is all the more remarkable if we consider how the notion of timor had been crucial in the Enlightenment debate on the origins of religions, which were in fact

[390] See Emilio Peruzzi, *Odi, Melisso,* in Id., *Studi leopardiani*, 2 vols. (Florence: Olschki, 1987), vol. II, pp. 75-138, pp. 78-79.
[391] *TPP,* p. 891.

grounded in the *timor* against the unknown.[392] Leopardi's choice is indirectly explained by two passages of the *Zibaldone*:

Altro è il timore altro il terrore. Quest~~o~~a è passione molto più forte e viva di quell~~o~~a, e molto più ~~vile~~avvilitiv~~o~~a dell'animo e sospensiv~~o~~a dell'uso della ragione, anzi quasi di tutte le facoltà dell'animo, ed anche de' sensi del corpo. Nondimeno la prima di queste passioni non cade nell'uomo ~~coraggioso e [?] savio~~perfettamente coraggioso e savio, la seconda sì. Egli non teme~~,~~ mai, ma può sempre essere atterrito. Nessuno può debitamente vantarsi ~~x~~di non poter essere spaventato (*Zib.* 2803-04, 21 June 1823).

Lo spavento e il terrore sebbene di un grado maggior del timore, contuttociò bene spesso~~non conte~~ sono molto meno vili, anzi talvolta non contengono nessuna viltà: e possono cadere anche negli uomini perfettamente coraggiosi, al contrario del timore. […] Lo spavento degli spiriti, così puerile esso, e fondato in opinione così puerile, è stato (ed ancora è) comune ad uomini coraggiosissimi (*Zib.* 262, 5 October 1820)

The title 'Dei terrori notturni' is therefore an ambiguous quotation, in which the translation from the Biblical verse comes to embody the ambivalence in which the young Leopardi – and the culture of the Enlightenment as a general demystification of tradition – is trapped: the man who is 'coraggioso e savio' – namely adult, and freed from prejudices by a 'secolo illuminato' – cannot be overwhelmed by the 'timore', but can still be terrified by the 'terrori' rooted in childhood.

Lascio stare il timore e lo spavento proprio di quell'età (per mancanza di esperienza e sapere, e per forza d'immaginazione~~)~~ ancor vergine e fresca): timor di pericoli di ogni sorta, timore di vanità e chimere proprio solamente di quell'età, e di nessun'altra; timor delle larve, sogni, ~~mor~~cadaveri, strepiti notturni, immagini reali, spaventose per quell'età e indifferenti poi, come maschere ec. ec. (V. il Saggio sugli Errori popolari degli antichi.) Quest'ultimo timore era così terribile in quell'età, che nessuna sventura, nessuno spavento, nessun pericolo per formidabile che sia, ha forza in altra età, di produrre in noi angosce, smanie, orrori, spasimi, travaglio insomma paragonabile a quello dei detti timori fanciulleschi. L'idea degli spettri, quel timore spirituale, soprannaturale, sacro, e di un altro mondo, che ci agitava frequentemente in quell'età, aveva un non so che di ~~la~~sì formidabile e smanioso, che non può esser paragonato con verun altro sentimento dispiacevole dell'uomo. Nemmeno il timor

[392] Mazzarella, *I dolci inganni*, p. 21n.

dell'inferno in un moribondo, credo che possa essere così intimamente terribile. Perchè la ragione e l'esperienza rendono inaccessibili ~~ai~~a qualunque sorta di sentimento, quell'ultima e profondissima parte e radice dell'animo e del cuor nostro, alla qu~~e~~ale penetrano e arrivano, e la quale scuotono e ~~e~~invadono le sensazioni fanciullesche o primitive, e ~~e~~in ispecie il detto timore. (*Zib.* 531-32, 20 gennaio 1821)

'Terrore' is therefore the kind of fear which is characteristic to post-Enlightenment man: a few years earlier, while drafting *De l'Allemagne* (1813), Madame de Staël had used an analogous vocabulary in highlighting how 'les revenant set les sorciers plaisent au peuple comme aux hommes éclairés'.[393]. Through this, Leopardi seems actually to be seeking, as Gilberto Lonardi writes, 'una sua produttivissima strada per non sottrarsi allo *spavento* e al *terribile* pur senza mostrare con questo di concedere nulla ai romantici'.[394] This operation is pursued by rooting the 'terrore' within the perimeter of the 'familiar', which is precisely the structure – more than that of the sublime, which for Lonardi is the aesthetical concept on which Leopardi's semantic of 'terrore' is articulated[395] – of the Freudian uncanny. Leopardi's notion of 'terrore' is one of the facets of the uncanny as a 'toxic side effect' of the Enlightenment,[396] an 'irrational' and helpless fear that is no longer the *timor* of the child or of the 'ancient' (whose 'paradigmatic frame' includes the possibility of a supernatural interpretation of phenomena),[397] but which arises from the acknowledgment of truth and is

[393]Germaine de Staël, *De l'Allemagne*, ed. by Simone Balayé, 2 vols. (Paris: Flammarion, 1968), vol. I, pp. 237-238.
[394] Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero*, p. 71.
[395] 'Così, intanto, al *terribile* – cui del resto era già sensibilissimo il Leopardi adolescente, se, dietro un capitolo, per esempio, sui *sogni* o sui *terrori notturni* o sul *tuono* negli *Errori popolari degli antichi*, s'intravede anche qui la rimembranza fanciullesca, gli *spaventi* che nella notte assalgono Giacomo bambino –, anche, dicevo, al *terribile* potrà spettare un luogo nella poesia leopardiana. Potrà condurre, per la via dello *spavento* […] al sublime: come già diceva Blair, quando legava, appunto, su più tenue traccia longiniana, lo *spavento* al sublime', ibid., pp. 73-74.
[396] Terry Castle, *The Female Thermometer. Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 8.
[397]I make reference to the concept of paradigm as defined by Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1970), also considering the

therefore terrifying insofar as it is rooted in the inexplicable. As Leopardi writes in the *Saggio*, 'Voltaire, quel banderaio degli spiriti forti, quell'uomo sì ragionevole e sì nemico dei pregiudizi, tremava nelle tenebre come un fanciullo',[398] lucidly acknowledging the reciprocal interconnection of the uncanny with the century of rationalism. The 'terrore'/uncanny arises when something unexpected '"[…] sovvien", *sub-venit*, […] si fa innanzi':[399] something that was already known, however – 'sovvenire' means also 'to recall' – and which, to quote Schelling's words, 'ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light'. The verb stresses the dimension of subjectivity, and makes explicit the deceitful nature of perception. In Leopardi's review of his poems, Francesco Erspamer writes,

> *sovvenire* sopravvisse solo nei luoghi (e in *tutti* i luoghi) in cui è in prima persona, e accompagnato dalla particella pronominale 'mi': '*mi* sovvien l'eterno', '*mi* sovvien del tempo', 'sovviem*mi*', 'risovvettam*mi*'. […] *Sovvenire* deriva da *sub-venire*, e implica uno spostamento *verso* il soggetto: un 'venire qui'. Quindi l'essere è presente: è il soggetto attuale a restare fermo, e il passato può esistere solo quando si sposti verso di lui, quando possa *venire*, quando sia recuperato dal soggetto e nel soggetto alla concretezza del presente. Per questo *sovvenire* permane quando è esplicitato il pronome di prima persona […]. Il *venire* del passato (tempo *irrevocabile*) è un miraggio, un'autosuggestione dell'io […].[400]

'Terrore' is therefore something that the civilised (or more simply, adult) subject experiences when something, suddenly and surprisingly, *sub-venit*, but which was – however – already known: in the same way, we can argue, as one may sporadically rediscover the pleasure of habitually returning to behold the stars. From this angle, the movement of 'sovvenire' is strictly interwoven with that of 'rimembrare', a verb which, as Erspamer points out, 'origina da *re-memorari*, e suggerisce l'opposta idea di uno spostamento *del* soggetto, il

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remarks made by Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things. On Method*, transl. by Luca D'Isanto and Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), pp. 9-32.

[398] *TPP*, p. 892.

[399] Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero*, p. 67.

[400] Erspamer, *La creazione del passato*, pp. 112-13.

suo andare altrove […]', so that, 'il ricordo è un *nostos*, un ritorno a casa, all'essere, seguendone le tracce'.[401] The sudden and unexpected return of something that 'ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to light' engenders the process of the 'ricordanza', in which the subject momentarily abandons the linearity of time and finds himself plunged into an 'altrove'.

The paraphrase from Avianus of *Zib.* 1 happens therefore to embody obliquely this ambiguity, staging a subversion of every temporal sequence through the reactivation of an 'immagine antica'. As Walter Benjamin writes in the sixth of his theses 'On the Concept of History', the unexpected and fleeting return of the past threatens the historicist illusions of continuity and tradition, establishing in their place the uncanny presence of anachronism:

> Articulating the past historically […] means appropriating a memory as it flashes up (*aufblitzt*) in a moment of danger (*im Augenblick einer Gefahr*). Historical materialism wishes to hold fast (*festhalten*) that image of the past which unexpectedly (*unversehens*) appears to the historical subject (*dem historischen Subjekt*) in the moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it.[402]

It is not by chance that the nebula of this abstract and pre-logical ancientness that *logos* inexorably fails to grasp is given solid form by the opening of the *Zibaldone*, a desperately modern work that – like Benjamin's oeuvre – chooses fragmentariness as an answer to the impossibility of conceptualizing any 'origin' or tradition. At the same time, the beginning of the *Zibaldone* obliquely evokes the image of Hecate, thus recalling her to her ancient role as the 'goddess who guarded entrances and liminal points'.[403] Hecate therefore announces the

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[401] Ibid., p. 113.
[402] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', in Id., *Selected Writings*, ed. by Howard Eiland, Michael W. Jennings, transl. by Edmund Jephcott, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Ma: Harvard University Press, 2003), vol. IV, pp. 389-411, p. 391.
[403] Sarah Iles Johnston, *Restless Dead: Encounters Between the Living and the Dead in Ancient Greece* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), p. 247.

liminal nature of Leopardi's operation, a Faustian experience – as it has been defined[404] – of confrontation with a sulphurous modernity (it is perhaps no coincidence that in Goethe's *Faust* the presence of hell also appears in the guise of a dog).

From this perspective, Leopardi's misunderstanding of the originally humorous nature of Avianus's text is singularly meaningful. The paraphrase of *Zib.* 1 is, as we have seen, a mutilated quotation, the partial retention of a text preserved by memory in an erroneous and incomplete way: the focus is displaced onto a facet that was only marginally present in the original text, thus putting the quotation to new uses. Needless to say, misunderstanding is always – from a Freudian point of view – the symptom of repression. In speaking of such processes of reading and quoting, and by evoking the Freudian notion of 'screen memory' (*Deckerinnerung*), Pierre Bayard recently coined the notion of 'screen books' (*livres-écrans*), arguing that memory preserves only fragments of read books that are often used in order to cover and dissimulate emotional recollections.[405]

From this angle, the incomplete and tendentious quotation from Avianus surely hides the semantic memory of other texts, namely those mentioned in the *Saggio*. Still, perhaps not only semantic memory is in play here. Freud conceptualises the notion of 'screen memories' in the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*: screen memories 'are substitutes […] for other impressions which are really significant', which 'a resistance prevents […] from being directly reproduced'.[406] Like in dreams, a process of displacement (*Verschiebung*) gives birth to a compromise formation, grounded in an 'associative relation' with the repressed content.[407] Would Leopardi's misquotation work as a screen memory? This is possible, though indemonstrable: Freud himself, in an essay of 1913 on 'The Occurrence in Dreams of

[404] Franco D'Intino, 'Il monaco indiavolato'.
[405] Bayard, *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read*, p. 44.
[406] *SE*, vol.VI, p. 43.
[407] *SE*, vol.VI, p. 43.

Material from Fairy Tales', points out how 'in a few people a recollection of their favourite fairy tales takes the place of memories of their own childhood; they have made the fairy tales into screen memories'.[408] The paraphrase would therefore allude to specific 'terrors of the night' perceived by the subject, the ones to which Leopardi himself alludes in the *Saggio*, in a passage that only with great difficulty we can restrain ourselves from reading as autobiographical:

> Ombre, larve, spettri, fantasmi, visioni, ecco gli oggetti terribili che faceano tremare i poveri Antichi, e che, convien pur dirlo, ispirano ancora a noi dello spavento. Se i pregiudizi sogliono cedere al tempo, questo, pochissimo ha perduto del suo vigore […]. Come è d' uopo ripetere dalla educazione la maggior parte degli errori popolari universali, quella dei fanciulli su questo punto è veramente malvagia, e ben lontana dal corrispondere al presente stato di civilizzazione. Muove la bile del filosofo il vedere con quanta cura s' istruisca un fanciullo intorno alle favole più terribili, e alle chimere più atte a fare impressione sulla sua mente. Egli sa appena balbettare, e segnarsi la fronte ed il petto per mostrare di esser nato nella vera religione, che la storia dei folletti e delle apparizioni ha già occupato il suo luogo nel di lui intelletto pauroso e stupefatto. Alquanto inquieto, perchè vivace, *egli era forse molesto ad una allevatrice impaziente*, solita a confondere il brio colla insolenza, e a chiamar bontà la dabbenaggine. *La novella degli spiriti fu lo specifico sicuro per liberarla dalla importunità del fanciullo*. Eccolo infatti divenuto attonito e timoroso; riguardare l'avvicinarsi della notte come un supplizio, i luoghi tenebrosi come caverne spaventevoli; palpitare nel letto angosciosamente; sudar freddo; raccogliersi pauroso sotto le lenzuola; cercar di parlare, e nel trovarsi solo inorridire da capo a piedi. L'allevatrice ha perfettamente ottenuto il suo intento. Il fanciullo, durante il giorno, non dimentica i suoi terrori notturni […]'[409]

[408] *SE*, vol. XII, p. 281.
[409] *TPP*, p. 892.

CHAPTER 3

REVIVALS AND REVENANTS

'Le Ricordanze' therefore articulates a tension between past and present, in which the present constructs its identity in relation to the past, finding in such a move its self-legitimation (as well as the poetic speech). It could be said that the poetic 'I' of the 'Ricordanze' can start speaking only insofar as a fracture between past and present has occurred, a 'departure from home', which is physical (departure from Recanati), individual (the process of growth) and historical (the acknowledgment of being a modern, post-Enlightenment speaking subject). In other words, the subject can speak precisely because he has crystallised and removed the past, which has become something other that is alienated from the subject. The perspective of the 'here' and 'now' relativises and outdistances what has been, a process of burial of the past that the use of 'passato remoto' seals:

con dolor sottentra
Il pensier del presente, un van desio
Del passato, ancor tristo, e il dire: io fui. (l. 58-60)

As Giulio Bollati writes, in 'A Silvia' and 'Le Ricordanze'

> ciò che autorizza la ripresa poetica, o più precisamente la stessa possibilità di fare poesia, è l'allontanamento del materiale lirico in un tempo remoto. Si può certamente dire che questi sono i canti della memoria, ma solo nel senso che la memoria è l'alibi, l'astuzia messa in opera dalla ragione poetica per aggirare l'interdizione storica, il divieto obbiettivo della poeticità sentito da Leopardi come moralmente e intellettualmente ineludibile.[410]

[410] Bollati, 'Introduzione', p. LXXIX.

I rather think that, between this 'pensier del presente' and the 'van desio/del passato', what is at stake is the whole historical meditation of Leopardi's: not only an autobiographical reflection, but the entire questioning of history as a discoursive practice that literally constructs modernity by stating the unavoidable fissure that divides 'what is gone' from 'what it is' ('il dire: io fui'). As Reinhart Koselleck has shown, modernity witnesses a 'temporalization [*Verzeitlichung*] of history',[411] through which the past is constructed as an alterity that cannot be fully recuperated. In arts, the consciousness of this fracture is the grounding for what Mario Andrea Rigoni calls 'l'estetizzazione dell'antico', namely the practice of 'revival' – first of all neo-classical – as the only way, for the past to be manifest again:

> Se il Rinascimento si fondava sul sentimento di un'affinità e continuità sostanziale con l' antico, che esso confidava di restituire allo splendore dell'attua1ità e della vita, tra la fine del Settecento e gli inizi dell'Ottocento. come causa e insieme effetto del grande rivolgimento romantico, si manifesta invece, da più parti e con la massima chiarezza, la sensazione che quel mondo è definitivamente sprofondato. È un momento cruciale per l'Occidente: il suolo compatto di una tradizione millenaria si dirompe e precipita, segnando l'avvento stesso di ciò che si dice il *moderno*. La consapevolezza teorica di questo enorme avvenimento fu tuttavia soltanto di pochi, raggiunti nel profondo dall'onda del sisma sovvertitore. A illustrare, per tutti, la situazione, si può assumere Friedrich Schlegel, il più geniale esponente della *Romantik*, che attribuisce all'archeologo Winckelmann il merito di aver posto la prima base d'una scienza materiale dell'antichità 'coll'avvertire 1'*assoluta differenza dell'antico dal moderno*'.[412]

The schematicity of this exposition can of course be questioned: the image of antiquity in the Renaissance, for instance, appears more problematic than the mere statement of a general feeling of affinity and continuity.[413] Still, it is impossible to avoid noticing how the 'van desio' of the past well epitomises the aporia of neo-classicism as a constitutive element of a

[411] Koselleck, *Futures Past*, p. 11.
[412] Mario Andrea Rigoni, 'L'estetizzazione dell'antico', p. 9.
[413] See for example Nicola Gardini in the third chapter of his recent *Rinascimento*, which is specifically devoted to 'Il tempo e le cose'(Turin: Einaudi, 2010), pp. 81-107.

late nineteenth-century way of dreaming antiquity. As Georges Didi-Huberman has shown, the confrontation between the frontispieces of Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Althertums* (1764) with that of Vasari's *Vite* (1568) highlights how, for Winckelmann, antiquity is not something that can be 'awakened' (namely, that has been feeble and silent, but that is still alive), but an alterity that makes a violent irruption within an already historical frame of knowledge.[414] 'Les livres, souvent, sont dédiés aux morts', adds Georges Didi-Huberman: 'Winckelmann a d'abord dédié son *Histoire de l'art* à l'art antique parce que, à ses yeux, l'art antique était mort depuis bien longtemps'.[415]

Equally, in the frontispiece of the French Jesuit Joseph-François Lafitau's *Mœurs des sauvages amériquains comparés aux mœurs des premiers temps* (1724), the geographical and cultural alterity of native Americans is outlined through a perspective of a historical kind, which reifies and crystallises as images of otherness the Mediterranean antiquity itself. On the left side of the engraving we see morsels of statues, medals and coins, 'oggetti desueti'[416] that epitomise antiquity as a landscape of ruins: it is, as François Hartog writes, 'un'antichità di rovine e in rovina', that'bisogna costruir[e] 'archeologicamente'', ascoltare ciò che non dice

[414]Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, pp.11-26.
[415]Ibid., p. 16.
[416] I take this expression from Francesco Orlando, *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura. Rovine, reliquie, rarità, robaccia, luoghi inabitati e tesori nascosti*, Torino, Einaudi, 1993.

più o che ormai non può più che mormorare'.[417] On the other side, upstanding, an angel addresses the writing muse to behold the edenic purity of 'savages' which are perceived as veritable 'living fossils'. Just like Walter Benjamin's 'angel of history', he has 'his face […] turned toward the past': in history, he does not perceive 'a chain of events', but rather 'one single catastrophe' that has unavoidably separated innocence from experience.[418]

History itself, as Michel de Certeau has well explained, is essentially constructed as a practice of objectification of the past that we can assimilate to a process of burial, to the relationship with something dead that does not consequently belong to the present anymore. Making history is therefore a spiritualistic operation, since it involves the conjuration of something buried that cannot reappear again if not under the shape of a ghostly survival. 'L'antichità tutta', Friedrich Schlegel writes, 'è tramontata per sempre, e solo nell'intimo di spiriti eletti può di nuovo, più debolmente, rivivere',[419] and in the same way Aby Warburg does not probably make a *boutade* when he spoke of his *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne* as a 'ghost-

[417]François Hartog, 'Il confronto con gli antichi', in Settis, *I Greci*, vol. I, pp. 3-37, pp. 22-23. See the whole essay for an overview of the confrontation with the ancients in modern European culture. On the comparison between the 'ancients' and native Americans see the Ulrich Raulff's 'postfazione' to Aby Warburg, *Il rituale del serpente. Una relazione di viaggio* (Milan: Adelphi,1998), pp. 69-112, pp. 84-90. The whole of Warburg's conference is focused on such a comparison: 'It is natural for the layman to think of this elementary form of emotional release through religious magic as typical of a primitive savage-state entirely unknown to Europe. And yet, two thousand years ago, in Greece – the very country from which we derive our European culture – ritual practices were in vogue which surpass in their blatant monstrosity even the things we see among the Indians', Aby Warburg, *A Lecture on Serpent Ritual*, transl. by W.F. Mainland, *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 2, n. 4 (1939), pp. 277-92, p. 288. For Leopardi's relationship with native American cultures see Marco Balzano, *I confini del sole. Leopardi e il nuovo mondo* (Venice: Marsilio, 2008). About Lafitau's frontispiece see also Michel de Certeau, 'Histoire et anthropologie chez Lafitau', in *Naissance de l'ethnologie? Anthropologie et missions en Amérique, XVIe-XVIIIe siècle*, ed. by Claude Blankaert (Paris: Cerf, 1985), pp. 63-89 and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter. Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, transl. by Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Baltimore-London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 129-133.

[418] Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', p. 392.

[419] Quoted in Rigoni 'L'estetizzazione dell'antico', p. 10.

story for the fully grown-up (*Gespentergeschichte für ganz Erwachsene*)'.[420] For Warburg, the survival of images is a *Nachleben der Antike*, a ghost-like persistence conjured by the plates of the *Bilderatlas Mnemosyne*.[421]

The uncanny tale can be therefore seen as a literary expedient through which the nineteenth century attempts to frame its own troubling relation with history. It is in fantastic literature that the 'ghost' becomes a sign through which the survival of the past is conceptualised, in the same way as the theme of the 'haunted house' can be seen as the metaphorisation of a tensive relation between the subject and the space of his own *heimlichkeit*, of an Ego that is no longer master in its own house. Both Freud and Warburg actually paid tribute to fantastic literature: the first with the essay on *The Uncanny* – focused for the most part on Hoffmann's tale *Der Sandmann* – and with the analysis of Jensen's story *Gradiva*, and the second by conceiving, together with André Jolles, the aborted project of the exchange of letters on the 'nymph', 'fantasia maschile tardo-vittoriana'[422] about an 'uncanny portrait'.

In terms of the post-Enlightenment construction of the past as an alterity, 'in Italia si può citare soltanto il caso di Leopardi, perché nessuno ebbe come lui una percezione così acuta e così chiara del fenomeno, e nessuno, neppure fuori d'Italia, fece oggetto di tanta insistita riflessione il fatto che fra antico e moderno esistesse una discontinuità tale da situare questi due mondi su versanti opposti e non comunicanti'.[423] Leopardi, however, avoids completely the fantastic strategy, as is evident by the use, in the *Ginestra* and in the *Paralipomeni della*

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[420] Quoted in Ernst Hans Gombrich, *Aby Warburg: An Intellectual Biography* (London: Phaidon Press, 1986), p. 287.
[421] '[L]*'Atlante* era uno strumento visivo di evocazione, e le sue tavole, con gli elementi meticolosamente disposti, aveva [sic] molto incomune con le strutture degli altari cerimoniali Hopi', Kurt W. Foster and Katia Mazzucco, *Introduzione ad Aby Warburg e all''Atlante della Memoria'*, ed. by Monica Centanni (Milan: Bruno Mondadori, 2002),p. 38.
[422]Ibid, p. 16.
[423] Rigoni, 'L'estetizzazione dell'antico', p. 10.

Batracomiomachia, of the theme of Pompeiian ruins,[424] namely of one of the most popular topics of nineteenth-century fantastic literature (from Gautier's *Arria Marcella* to Jensen's *Gradiva*).[425] Still, as we have seen, it is possible to read 'Le Ricordanze' as the sudden irruption of an *Unheimlichkeit* in the familiar space of the *Heim*: something that is structurally close to the gothic-Romantic theme of the 'haunted house', but in which, a hundred years before Freud's *Der Wahn und die Träume in W. Jensens 'Gradiva'* and *Das Unheimliche*, the 'haunted house' is the 'house of the Ego', and the ghosts (which, exactly as in *Gradiva*, the delirium locates in the more emotive than historical setting of 'antiquity') are precisely 'ricordanze', infantile reminiscences. Through the theory of illusions Leopardi comes therefore to solve the aporia between individual and collective memories, and to answer the fully modern impasse between memory and history, constructing poetry as the place where the *Antike* finds its ultimate *Nachleben*:

> Hanno questo di proprio le opere di genio, che quando anche rappresentino al vivo la nullità delle cose, quando anche dimostrino evidentemente e facciano sentire l'inevitabile infelicità della vita, quando anche esprimano le più terribili disperazioni, tuttavia ad un'anima grande che si trovi anche in uno stato di estremo abbattimento, disinganno, nullità, noia e scoraggiamento della vita, o nelle più acerbe e mortifere disgrazie (sia che appartengano alle alte e forti passioni, sia a qualunque altra cosa); servono sempre di consolazione, raccendono l'entusiasmo, e non trattando né rappresentando altro che la morte, le rendono, almeno momentaneamente, quella vita che aveva perduta. (*Zib.* 259-60, 4 October 1820)

These lines articulate a dialectic between death and life, in which what is dead is momentary re-animated. Illusions behave therefore like the shadows of the dead in Homer's *Odyssey*, namely as ghosts who yearn for the fleeting non-life offered by blood. It is hence only in the space of the fleeting instant – of the infinitesimal, be it fragment or detail – that

[424] See Fedi, *Mausolei di sabbia*, pp. 32-62.
[425] See Massimo Scotti, *Gotico mediterraneo* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2007), pp. 173-204 and Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny*, pp. 45-53.

antiquity can shine again: like gold, the 'oro di Omero' that Gilberto Lonardi uses as the title of a book of 2005.[426] We can therefore apply to Leopardi the famous statement made by Aby Warburg, namely that 'the good God is in the detail':[427] the 'antique' acts in a subterranean and allusive way, the mythologem penetrates surreptitiously within texts, in details, unperceivable echoes and clues. Lonardi highlights, in *A Silvia*, the return of an 'antico *pathos* della *forma* […] poetico-religiosa omerica', adding that 'Aby Warburg avrebbe potuto parlarne […] come di una antica *pathosform* [sic]'.[428] Warburg's notion of *Pathosformel* is by no means a uniquely visual phenomenon: Giorgio Agamben has widely shown how the *Pathosformel* is articulated on a dialectical structure between object, phantasm/image and spoken word, thus eliminating every stark distinction between linguistic and visual domains: 'Si fraintende la lettura dell'Atlante se so cerca tra [le immagini] qualcosa come un archetipo o un originale da cui le altre deriverebbero. Nessuna delle immagini è l'originale, nessuna è semplicemente una copia. […] Le *Pathosformeln* sono fatte di tempo, sono cristalli di memoria storica, "fantasmati" […] intorno ai quali il tempo scrive la sua coreografia.[429]

Already in 1948, Ernst Robert Curtius dedicated *Europaïsche Literatur und lateinisches Mittelalter* to Aby Warburg's memory, so as to indicate how the survival of antiquity was not only confined to the extra-verbal memory of images, but included those linguistic unities – *topoi*, tropes, formulas – that could equally work as *imagines* composing a *Bildersprache* (literally, 'language made of images'). The connection was indeed already Warburg's, who, in conceiving the definition of *Pathosformel*, eloquently echoed the notion of 'formula' in Milman Parry's works on Homeric philology. Warburg's inquiry for the survival of antiquity in small details – the breeze, the 'moving accessories' ('bewegtes Beiwerk') – finds singular

[426] Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero*, p. 9.
[427] The origin of the expression is uncertain.
[428] Lonardi 2005, 146.
[429] Giorgio Agamben, *Ninfe* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), p. 18.

assonances with Leopardi's operation, aimed as it is at the individuation of the shadow and the taste of antiquity in '*topoi* e modi o forme-archetipo del passato lontanissimo della poesia (e *insieme*, a volte, del sacro)'.[430] Quite interestingly, Lonardi evokes the spectre of Warburg apropos of 'A Silvia', a text in which the surviving antiquity is brought back to the surface by the *Pathosformeln* of the swift movement of hands and of the girl's singing voice. Just like 'Le Ricordanze', 'A Silvia' shows an interweavement of recollections and conjurations, linked to an image of truncated feminine youth; and perhaps not by chance, if we read these poems from a Warburgian angle, in both these images wear names of nymphs.

[430] Lonardi, *L'oro di Omero*, p. 21.

CHAPTER 4

THE NYMPH

Line 413: a nymph came pirouetting.
In the draft there is the lighter and more musical:
413: A nymphet pirouetted.
Vladimir Nabokov, *Pale Fire*

eine Nymphe, die im Fliehen schon gefallen ist.
Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde*

As all commentators explain, the names of Silvia and Nerina derive from Torquato Tasso's pastoral play *Aminta*, of 1573, in which they belong to two nymphs. According to Mario Fubini and Emilio Bigi, a reference to Tasso is also incorporated even in the first line of the poem: the invocation 'Vaghe stelle dell'Orsa' thus being an intertextual echo of the first line of Tasso's *Corona*, 'Vaghe ninfe del Po, ninfe sorelle'.[431] The word 'nymph' – or, better, for Leopardi as a classical philologist, the Greek word *nymphē* – may therefore be seen as 'an unspeakable (hidden, crypted) word', whose 'rich, orderly polysemia […] [is] lurking behind a regular […] series of *cryptonyms*',[432] mediated by Tasso's intertextual memory and secretly structuring the poem. Let us consider precisely the polysemia of the word *nymphē*:

I. Epic voc. *nympha*^: Doric *nympha* :—, *a young wife, bride*, Lat. *nupta*
2. *Any married woman*

[431] Fubini-Bigi, in Leopardi, *Canti*, ed. by Mario Fubini and Emilio Bigi (Turin: Loescher, 1964), p. 172 n. 1
[432] Jacques Derrida, 'Fors: The Anglish Words of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok', transl. by Barbara Johnson, in Nicolas Abraham & Maria Torok, *The Wolf Man's Magic Word: A Cryptonymy*, transl. by Nicholas Rand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. xi-xlviii, p. xli.

3. *A marriageable maiden*
4. = Lat. *nurus*, daughter-in-law
II. As prop. name, *a Nymph*, Hom.; *theaì Nymphai* Il.; distinguished by special names, *spring*-nymphs being *Naïádes*, *sea*- nymphs *Nērēídes*, *tree*- nymphs *Dryádes*, *Hamadryádes*, *mountain*- nymphs *orestiádes*, *oreádes*, *meadow*- nymphs *leimōniádes.*
2. Persons in a state of *rapture*, as seers and poets, were said to be *caught by the Nymphs*, *nymphólēptoi*, Lat. *lymphatici*.
III. *The chrysalis*, or *pupa* of moths[433]

These meanings therefore shift as they are superimposed onto each other. Most of all, they seem to stem from a certain idea of indeterminateness, around a sort of intermediary status of potentiality: the chrysalis as a potential butterfly; the young, marriageable maid as a potential woman (no longer a child, not yet a lady); the mythological nymph with all its peculiarities – not a woman, not a goddess, but an intermediary (and therefore demonic) creature. From this perspective, Silvia and Nerina, taken as paragons of creatures whose youth has been brutally truncated by death, and who have therefore not fully experienced life and disillusion, are nymphs in the fullest, etymological acceptation of the word. Surely the image of the 'young girl', constructed by libertine and eighteenth-century literature as an eroticised object of desire, is employed in post-Enlightenment modernity as a paragon of charming innocence,[434] and is deliberately connected to mythological nymphs in the twentieth century, in Nabokov's *Lolita*, through the employment of the Elizabethan diminutive *nymphet*:

> Between the age limits of nine and fourteen there occur maidens who, to certain bewitched travelers, twice or many times older than they, reveal their true nature which is not human but nymphic (that is, demoniac); and these chosen creatures I propose to designate as 'nymphets'.[435]

[433]Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford. Clarendon Press, 1889), *s.v.*
[434]. Cfr. Laura Kreyder, *La passion des petites filles. Histoire de l'enfance féminine de la Terreur à Lolita* (Arras: Artois Presses Université, 2003).
[435] Vladimir Nabokov, *The Annotated Lolita*, ed. by Alfred Appel, Jr. (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 16.

Nabokov, among other things an entomologist (the symbol of the chrysalis-butterfly is widely disseminated in his works), thus consciously reunited the whole semantic area of *Nymphe* in *Lolita*: young maiden, nymph-demon, and *pupa*.

Lolita is not the only modern work haunted by nymphs. In 1900, Aby Warburg and the Dutch scholar André Jolles produce a very odd narrative experiment: a fictive exchange of letters about a feminine figure appearing in Domenico Ghirlandaio's frescoes in the Cappella Tornabuoni in Florence, which they decide to name 'the Nymph'. In the painting showing the nativity of the Baptist, 'there runs', Jolles writes with a climax of verbs and an oxymoron, 'no, that is not the word, there flies, or rather there hovers – the object of my dreams, which slowly assumes the proportions of a charming nightmare'.[436] This 'fantastic figure', 'a servant girl, or a classical nymph', is characterised by a peculiar aerial nature and levity, embodied by a 'lively, light-footed and rapid gait', an 'irresistible energy' and a 'striding step (*Diese lebendig leichte, aber so höchst bewegte Weise zu gehen; diese energische Unaufhaltsamskeit, diese Länge vom Schritt*)'; it seems, Jolles continues, 'as if the servant girl rushed with winged foot through the clear ether instead of running on the real ground (*mit beflügelten Füssen den hellen Äther durchschnellt*)'.[437] The question is who she is: 'As a real being of flesh and blood', Warburg replies, 'she may have been a freed slave from Tartary... but in her true essence (*ihrem wirklichen Wesen*) she is an elementary sprite, a pagan goddess in exile (*ein Elementargeist, eine heidnische Göttin im Exil*)'.[438] *Nympha* is therefore a supernatural being which manifests its true nature in the act of walking: the aerial grace of her step shows her as an ancient presence, resurfacing in the Renaissance fresco. Three years later, in 1903, the German writer Wilhelm Jensen composes *Gradiva*, a short novel inspired

[436]André Jolles-Aby Warburg, 'Fragment on the *Nympha*', quoted in Gombrich, *Aby Warburg*, p. 107.
[437] Ibid., pp. 107-08.
[438] Ibid., p. 124.

by a neo-attic Roman bas-relief and nowadays mostly known because Sigmund Freud, in 1907, analyzed it from a psychoanalytical perspective, and although nymphs are not explicitly mentioned, the connection between the way of walking and the supernatural nature of a feminine figure is the same:

> [...] a complete female figure *in the act of walking*; she was still *young*, but *no longer in childhood* and, on the other hand, apparently not a woman, but a Roman virgin about in her twentieth year. [...] In her was embodied something humanly commonplace [...] as if the artist [...] had fixed her in a clay model *quickly, from life, as she passed in the street* [...]. So the young woman was fascinating. Not at all because of plastic beauty of form, but because she possessed something rare in antique sculpture, a *realistic, simple, maidenly grace* which gave the impression of *imparting life* to the relief. This was effected chiefly by the *movement* represented in the picture. [...] The left foot had advanced, and the right, about to follow, touched the ground only lightly with the tips of the toes, while the sole and heel were raised almost vertically. This movement produced a double impression of exceptional agility and of confident composure, and the *flight-like poise*, combined with a firm step, lent her the *peculiar grace*. [...] he had called it to himself Gradiva, 'the girl *splendid in walking*. (emphasis mine)[439]

These texts define pretty well, I think, the semantic constellation connected to the Nymph as it resurfaces in modern times: a liminal being between woman and goddess, showing her demonic and supernatural nature in the act of passing; an image imparting the impression of life where it was not by means of 'a certain something', of a fleeting 'grace' embodied in the lightness of movement; an ambiguous creature, haunting the subject as a 'charming nightmare'; and a presence of the past, resurfacing as a survival of antiquity in modern times, with the disruptive charge of an anachronism.

All these elements appear, already, under the surface of Leopardi's text. On the one hand, in a famous passage of the *Zibaldone*, which is usually connected to 'A Silvia', Leopardi

[439]Wilhelm Jensen, *Gradiva: A Pompeiian Fancy* (1903), in Sigmund Freud, *Delusion and Dreaman Interpretation in the Light of Psychoanalysis of* Gradiva, *a Novel, by Wilhelm Jensen*, transl. by Helen M. Downey (New York: Moffat, Yard & Co., 1917), pp. 3-5.

recuperates the the *Frauentypus* of the 'young girl' of libertine and Enlightenment literature, although systematically (and eloquently) deprived of every erotic connotation:

> Una donna di 20, 25 o 30 anni ha forse più d'attraits, più d'illecebre, ed è più atta a ispirare, e maggiormente a mantenere, una passione. [...]Ma veram. una giovane dai 16 ai 18 anni ha nel suo viso, ne' suoi moti, nelle sue voci, salti ec. un non so che di divino, che niente può agguagliare. Qualunque sia il suo carattere, il suo gusto, allegra o malinconica, capricciosa o grave, vivace o modesta; quel fiore purissimo, intatto, freschissimo di gioventù, quella speranza vergine, incolume che gli si legge nel viso e negli atti, o voi nel guardarla concepite in lei e per lei; quell'aria d'innocenza, d'ignoranza completa del male, delle sventure, de' patimenti; quel fiore, insomma, quel primissimo fior della vita; tutte queste cose, anche senza innamorarvi, anche senza interessarvi, fanno in voi un'impressione così viva, così profonda, così ineffabile, che voi non vi saziate di guardar quel viso, ed io non conosco cosa che più di questa sia capace di elevarci l'anima, di trasportarci in un altro mondo, di darci un'idea d'angeli, di paradiso, di divinità, di felicità. Tutto questo, ripeto, senza innamorarci, cioè senza muoverci desiderio di posseder quell'oggetto (*Zib.* 4310-11, 30 June 1828)

On the other hand, Leopardi's 'anthropological' reflection contains a systematic, though oblique, presence of mythological nymphs, which are always connected to the dimension of the demonic/demoniac. This happens in the *Saggio*, where the nymphs are generally evoked in connection with the god Pan and the fauns, but most of all in the *Zibaldone*. Here, in December 1821, Leopardi notes that medieval writers employed the words *nympha* and *Lamia* with a peculiar interchangeability, suggesting a possible deviation of folklore in relation to written culture:

> Gli scrittori latini adoperarono Lamia in senso di strega, o fata ec. e negli scrittori del trecento ella si trova, credo sempre, in senso di ninfa, tanto che i volgarizzatori di quel tempo, dove i testi latini dicono nympha, traducono regolarmente Lammia. Questa voce non la poterono dunque avere dagli scrittori latini, che l'adoprano in altro senso, ma dal volgare, il quale, come il volgo fu divenuto cristiano, e considerò le ninfe, e le altre deità del paganesimo come demonj, e mali spiriti, cominciò e costumossi a chiamar Lammie le ninfe de' Gentili. […] Ovvero intendo per Lammie le fate delle quali a que' tempi si discorreva, e la cui idea somiglia a quella delle streghe ec. e le fate essendo una specie di ninfe, e viceversa, prevalse questo costume di confonder le ninfe colle Lammie, tutte cose che dimostrano un uso volgare, e una perpetua conservazione della voce Lamia e dell'idea che significava, o di un'idea analoga alla medesima, nel volgare latino fino ai primordi dell'italiano […]. E chi sa che gli

stessi antichi latini (e greci) volgarmente non dicessero Lamia per ninfa? Considerando cioè la ninfa come un ente misterioso, e di misterioso potere, qual è appunto la Lamia. (*Zib.* 2300-04).

Leopardi's analysis seems here to anticipate the results of modern anthropological research in relation to the survival of classical figures in the form of so-called 'little people'. The metamorphoses of classical nymphs into medieval faeries have been reconstructed by Laurence Harf-Lancner, who indicates Alfred Maury's work (1843) as the first to identify faeries as the afterimages of ancient divinities.[440] The novelty of Leopardi's approach is however more striking. In displacing the focus from written culture to the analysis of folklore, Leopardi approaches here an 'antiquity' that is no longer that of the *auctoritates* explored in the *Saggio*, but possesses strong ethnographic implications. By individuating the survival of a popular religion in linguistic fossils, which are seen as 'stretch marks' in relation to dominant culture, Leopardi's analysis reveals a popular and subterranean worship that differs from the Winckelmann-like perception of antiquity, and survives as a *Nachleben der Antike* within language. In other words, Leopardi approaches here the double nature of archaic divinity, the same duality perceived by the young Warburg in beholding Ghirlandaio's nymph and, later, in analysing the symbology of the snake as displaying subterranean connections to the nymph.[441] Although masked in the *Zibaldone* by the screen of philological analysis and aristocratic disdain for the 'classe abbandonata ai pregiudizi dell'infimo volgo' (*Zib.* 2304), the ambiguous nature of the nymph resurfaces in the *Canti* with the same duality of 'giovinetta immortal'[442] and the same bipolar tension.

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[440]Laurence Harf-Lancner, *Morgana e Melusina. La nascita delle fate nel Medioevo*, transl. by Silvia Vacca (Turin: Einaudi, 1989), pp. 9-14.

[441] Cfr. Roberto Calasso, *La follia che viene dalle ninfe* (Milan: Adelphi, 2005), pp. 11-44.

[442] 'La giovinetta è personificazione classica (Kore-Persefone), con l'aggiunta dell'infinito *charme* che la giovinetta vera ha sull'anima leopardiana. Fare poesia è impossibilità di rinunciare ad inanimare-personificare tutto quel che sembra muto di persona e di anima. Il

L'image – parce que réglée sur les pouvoirs de l'inconscient – se joue des contradictions logiques: il semble bien que Warburg n'ait pas eu besoin de la théorie freudienne pour observer chaque jour cette inquiétante labilité du materia qu'interroge l'historien de l'art. Il lui a suffi d'un 'regard embrassant' sur les traditions littéraires et les déplacements iconographiques de la 'nymphe': ne fût-ce qu'à constituer son archive, il se trouvait de plain-pied dans ce que, plus tard, Georges Dumézil devait appeler 'l'ampleur et l'imprécision des *nymphaï*' Mortelle *et* immortelle, endormie *et* dansante, possedé *et* possédante, secrète *et* ouverte, chaste *et* provocante, violée *et* nymphomane, secourable *et* fatale, protectrice de héros *et* ravisseuse d'hommes, être de la douceur *et* être de la hantise, *Ninfa* assure bien la fonction structurale d'un *opérateur de conversion* entre des valeurs antithétiques qu'elle 'polarise' et 'dépolarise' alternativement, selon la singularité de chaque incarnation.[443]

Importantly, this tension is mostly manifest in movement. Not by chance, it is precisely an analysis of movement in Renaissance 'survivals of antiquity' that allowed Aby Warburg to bypass the opposition between visual arts and poetry as expressed in Lessing's *Laocoon*, as well as Winckelmann's ideal of 'noble stillness and restrained grandeur'. This tension between stasis and movement, however (which is also a tension between poetry and visual arts, as well as between time and instant), had already been articulated by Leopardi. In January 1822 Leopardi claims for visual arts the necessity of expressing 'formulas of *pathos*': 'o pittura, o scultura, o poesia […], se non ha per soggetto veruna passione, […] è sempre posposta a quelle che l'esprimono, ancorché con minor perfezione nel loro soggetto' (*Zib.* 2361). Two years earlier, in reflecting on Madame de Staël's *Corinne*, Leopardi already explicitly connected *pathos* and movement, maintaining that

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vocativo giovinetta rompe il silenzio della luna silenziosa, la riconduce per forza di nostalgia nel cerchio degli esseri animati. E la giovinetta è intatta (almeno, nell'immaginazione poetica e religiosa) *kat'exochén.* Per sottrarla alla caducità propria della giovinezza, Leopardi aggiunge: *immortale*. La laicità leopardiana procede sempre come una rarefatta, e tuttavia decisa a non estinguersi, liturgia', Guido Ceronetti, 'Intatta luna', «Belfagor» 25 (1970), pp. 97-103: p. 99.

[443]Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante*, p. 348.

Una statua, una pittura ec. con un gesto, un portamento, un moto vivo, spiccato ed ardito, ancorchè non bello questo, nè bene eseguita quella, ci rapisce subito gli occhi a se, ancorchè in una galleria d'altre mille, e ci diletta, almeno a prima vista, più che tutte queste altre, s'elle sono di atto riposato ec., sieno pure perfettissime. E in parità di perfezione, quella, anche in seguito, ci diletta più di queste. Così non la pensa la Staël nella Corinna dove pretende che sia debito e proprio della pittura e scultura solamente il riposo delle figure, ma s'inganna, testimonio l'esperienza. ec. ec. (*Zib.* 4021-22, 24 gennaio 1824)

As it is clear, Leopardi's revaluation of movement is inextricably connected with his own theory of grace. It is difficult not to notice the peculiar Warbugian flavour of a statement made by Leopardi in August 1820: 'la grazia ordinariamente consiste nel movimento: e diremo così, la bellezza è nell'istante, e la grazia nel tempo' (*Zib.* 199, 4 August 1820). Leopardi's 'grace', as a problem of style and a clue of the 'survival of antiquity', is – as we have seen – an uncanny and 'pellegrina' presence that troubles beauty's fixedness: grace 'accompagna naturalmente ciò che è straniero' and not familiar (4293, 21 September 1827), and gracious movement is therefore, for Leopardi, something that is clearly inscribed within the domain of alterity, something insinuating within the iconic stillness of the 'beautiful' and alluding to an otherness. This alterity is the very same that is perceived by the young Warburg in noticing the handmaid in the Ghirlandaio fresco, whose lightness in movement visibly clashes with the statuary (and still medieval) fixedness of the other figures. Warburg's choice of naming this figure as 'the Nymph' highlights her uncanny and out-of-place nature, through which the anachronistic levity of paganism bursts into the Christian fresco.

The 'Nymph', as a feminine body caught in the act of walking, is therefore the visible embodiment of the *Nachleben der Antike*: an antiquity becoming manifest through the aerial grace of movement, summarising and symbolizing time in the uncanny detail of her pace. In similarly grounding the aesthetic alchemy of grace in a dialectic between time and movement, between the anachronistic survival of antiquity and the out-of-place ('pellegrino') detail, Leopardi can be therefore assimilated to those intellectual figures that, at the dawn of

modernity, gave the name of ancient nymphs to the uncanny figures that supervised the birth of modern forms of knowledge:

> Non ci sono fate buone, donne savie e amorevoli, disposte a chinarsi sulla culla della modernità intellettuale, tra il XIX e il XX secolo, mentre si preparano i grandi sconvolgimenti della storia. Ci sono, invece, le ninfe: belle apparizioni ornate di panneggi, venute da non si sa dove, volteggianti nel vento, sempre conturbanti, non sempre sagge, quasi sempre erotiche, talvolta inquietanti.[…] Così si presentano, tra tante altre apparizioni, *Arria Marcella* di Théophile Gautier, *Aurélia* di Nerval, *Hérodiade* di Mallarmé, *L'Eve future* di Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, *Lulu* di Wedekind, poi di Alban Berg, *La donna senza ombra* di Hofmannsthal, poi di Richard Strauss e, in seguito, *Nadja* di André Breton… È noto che perché nasca qualcosa che possa definirsi moderna 'scienza dell'anima', occorre che Freud, nel 1885, veda levarsi le isteriche in crisi nel teatro anatomico di Charcot, alla Salpêtrière. […] In modo analogo, perché nasca qualcosa che possa definirsi moderna 'scienza delle immagini', occorrerà un'apparizione che con la stessa forza sappia rovesciare un'altra forma di sapere scolastico: la storia dell'arte.[444]

In moving on the same ridge between history and memory, between lightness and *naïveté*, Leopardi therefore also exhumes the 'nymph' as a woman of the past (both ontogenetic and phyologenetic) in whose light step history and antiquity can once again shine.

Not by chance, the last stanza of the 'Ricordanze' is scanned by the recurrence of the verb 'passare', in its past tense 'passasti'. The verb is repeated four times, outlining a movement of departure that is however intersected– as it is in 'A Silvia' – with a downward movement of someone lying down and nearing the soil ('Tu, misera, cadesti', 'A Silvia', l. 61; 'E giacevi', 'Le Ricordanze', l. 157). As Didi-Huberman writes, classical nymphs already 'tendevano verso il suolo, si flettevano e spesso si adagiavano': 'come l'*aura* di Benjamin,' he adds, 'la Ninfa *declina* con i tempi moderni. In senso proprio, non si può dire che invecchi, perché è un essere della sopravvivenza, e nemmeno che scompaia: semplicemente *s'accosta al suolo*'.[445] Nerina's passing movement embodies the same ambiguity: although an elaborated synonym

[444] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa moderna. Saggio sul panneggio caduto* (Milan: Il Saggiatore, 2004), pp. 11-12.
[445]Ibid., p. 15.

for ‘dying’, it recalls the very Christian image of the human journey through the earthly Babylon, which is made even more terrible by the absence, in Leopardi’s thought, of any *Civitas Dei* whatsoever. The metahistorical gaze of the ‘Ricordanze’ is thus constructed as an a-theological afterimage of the ‘celestial eye’ (Certeau)[446] of medieval frescoes, in which the viewer possesses an overall perspective on human affairs: from the point of view of Nature, Nerina is nothing but an ephemeral creature, consumed by an inhuman process of creation and destruction.

This ephemerality may recall the acceptation of Νύμφη as a chrysalis: from this angle, Nerina embodies the ephemerality to which all modernity is doomed, and first of all in the domain of love. Nerina is – literally – a ‘passante’ in Baudelaire’s terms, namely the sudden and fleeting ‘éclair’ that is the only way for modernity to reactivate the Petrarchan code of love.[447] Leopardi’s experience of love is the experience of a shock that violently reassesses the boundary of literary tradition in which the erotic experience is inscribed: the hendiadys ‘ridenti e fuggitivi’ of ‘A Silvia’ (l. 3) incorporates the adjective that is systematically connected to Beatrice’s eyes in Dante’s *Paradiso*, coupling it with one – *fugitivæ* – that traditionally alludes to the fleeting nature of nymphs. In parallel, ephemerality alludes to the dimension of time, physically embodied by the clock, which in the ‘Ricordanze’ suddenly enters at ll. 50-51 (‘il suon dell’ora / Della torre del borgo’). The clock of the ‘Ricordanze’ is also a meditation on the fleeting nature of time, which Leopardi also evokes – always using the image of steps – in ‘ La sera del dì di festa’, where the poetic subject portrays himself while reflecting on ‘come tutto al mondo passa / E quasi orma non lascia’ (ll. 29-30). The

[446]Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 92.
[447] Cfr. Antonio Prete, *Finitudine e infinito. Su Leopardi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1998) and ‘Un verso’, in *Giacomo Leopardi. Viaggio nella Memoria*, pp. 121-24, and Fabio Camilletti, 2009 ‘“On pleure les lèvres absentes”: “Amor di lontano” tra Leopardi e Baudelaire’, *Italian Studies* 64, n. 1 (Spring 2009), pp. 77-90..

hour, the 'precise fleeting instant' (Agamben),[448] is therefore a visible emblem of this 'passing' of how 'vola / Il caro tempo giovanil' ('Le Ricordanze', ll. 43-44), and shows, in an equally encrypted form, the hidden image of the nymph, precisely as *fugitiva* as the hour. Indeed, archaic Greek religion shows an eloquent kinship between nymphs and the divinities known as *Hōraï*, which has led interpreters to postulate a common origin (quite interestingly, also shared by the *Charites*/Graces).[449] *Gradiva* herself seems to belong to the *Hōraï*, just like the famous 'Flora' of Ercolano, and in the novel *Sylvie* (1853) Gérard ne Nerval defines this figure as one of the 'Heures divines', inexplicably endowing her with an 'étoile au front' that closely recalls the joy shining on Nerina's brow ('in fronte / La gioia ti splendea', ll. 53-54). In being a novel on memory and the unstoppable fleeing of youth, *Sylvie* seems to share a secret intimacy with 'Le Ricordanze', grounded as it is in the themes of *nostos* and the loss of innocence. Like the 'Ricordanze', *Sylvie* is constructed through the obsessive interweavement of present, imperfect and past tenses, which produce what Umberto Eco has called an 'effetto-nebbia' in which memory and illusions are confused.[450] The proximity between the two works can be extended to their reception: also *Sylvie*, like several of the *Canti*, has been considered for decades as a country, neoclassical idyll, and only Proust's reading in the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* has highlighted how its 'tinte' are rather 'color porpora, di un rosa porpora di velluto purpureo e violaceo'.[451] Sylvie's name itself has evident nymphic echoes, as well as the presence of the Hours, the 'Heures divines' evoked by the protagonist in the first chapter, but also those of the broken clock appearing in the third, a clock that – like the bell of the 'Ricordanze' – 'è un concentrato simbolico di tutto il racconto, […] perché è lì a dire (più al

[448] Agamben, *Infancy and History*, p. 93.
[449] Jennifer Larson, *Greek Nymphs. Myth, Cult, Lore* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 7-8.
[450] Eco, 'Rilettura di Sylvie', p. 125.
[451] Cit. in ibid., p. 99.

lettore, forse, che a Jerard) che l'ordine dei tempi non lo ricupereremo mai'.[452] Precisely this 'suon dell'ora' (a 'casualità', writes Luigi Blasucci,[453] which introduces the third stanza of the poem) reaffirms the occult presence of the nymphs within the poem as fleeting emblems of time that the subject must grasp. As Walter Benjamin summarises, 'the true image of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the moment of its recognisability and is never seen again'.[454] Only within poetic language can the final possession of the 'fugitive' nymph take place: the poetic 'I' doubles itself in a feminine image that is prematurely dead, attaining the projected *roman* precisely through this strategy of reverberation. It is only within poetic speech that the object of the novel (which is always, as Roland Barthes has noted, one's own past, configured as an alterity by a subtle strategy of mourning)[455] can be transfigured, and given its final shape.

We can therefore say that Nerina 'vera incessu patuit dea'(*Aen.* I, 405). Michel de Certau employs precisely this quotation from Virgil in order to maintain both the rhetorical and dialectical dimension of walking.[456] From this perspective, the 'Ricordanze' epitomises a light and wavy way of poetry-making, which is the only resource left to the poet in the age of the ephemerality of culture: the unsteady and light movement of the text reverberates in the dancing lightness of Nerina's pace. In parallel, this dance is deeply imbued with terror and melancholy, if we consider how the joy shining on Nerina's brow finds its antecedent in the Spartans doomed to death of 'All'Italia', where everyone 'parea ch'a danza e non a morte andasse' (l. 94).

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[452] Ibid., p. 131.
[453]Blasucci, 'I tempi dei "Canti"', p. 203.
[454]Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History', pp. 390-91.
[455] Roland Barthes, *La préparation du roman I et II. Cours et séminaires au Collège de France (1978-1979 et 1979-1980)*, ed. by Nathalie Léger (Paris: Seuil, 2003), pp. 25-28.
[456]Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, pp. 100-02.

To some extent, these are the nymphs: intermediary beings that grant a connection between subject and image, *phantasmata* in the fullest Aristotelian acceptation of the word to which the subject's desire tends, whose *jouissance* is unavoidably transferred to a *delectatio morosa* concretised in (poetic) speech. In commenting on the notion of *phantasma*, through which the phenomenon of mortals' encounters (sometime of a sexual nature) with faeries and nymphs were explained in the Christian Middle Ages, Harf Lancner notes how, in Walter Map (*De Nugis Curialium*, 1181-1193), Geoffrey of Auxerre (Commento all'*Apocalisse*, 1190) and Gervase of Tilbury ('De lamiis et nocturnis larvis', *Otia Imperialia*, c.1210-14), the words 'fantasia', 'fantasma' and 'fantasticus' are connected to the dimension of illusion and unreality.[457] Following Agamben, however, it seems that this notion is not evoked in order to maintain the illusory nature of the apparitions, but rather their demonic nature, namely as intermediary beings that build their own body, as Gervase of Tilbury writes, through the aerial element (in a pneumo-phantasmatic way), thus reflecting the beholder's desire.[458] They are therefore imaginary women precisely insofar as they are imagined, following 'the pneumatic link, uniting phantasm, word, and desire'.[459] Only in the poetic 'stanza', Agamben notes, can the definitive possession of the *imago* finally take place: 'the poetic sign appears as the sole enclosure offered to the fulfillment of love and erotic desire in their roles as the foundations and meaning of poetry'.[460]

Surely, the 'Ricordanze' is the final accomplishment of Leopardi's project of an autobiographical novel, finding in poetry their ideal medium.[461] 'Le Ricordanze' is therefore the Romantic, *Werther*-like novel that the author is unable (or unwilling) to write: in the same

[457] Harf Lancner, *Morgana e Melusina*, p. 42.
[458] Cit. in ibid., p. 45.
[459] Agamben, *Stanzas*, p. 128.
[460] Ibid.
[461] Cfr. Blasucci, 'I tempi dei "Canti"', pp. 202-03 and Folin, *Leopardi e il canto dell'addio*, p. 94n.

way, in *Sylvie*, Nerval ironically notes in the last chapter that 'Je […] appelle [Sylvie] quelquefois Lolotte, et elle me trouve un peu de ressemblance avec Werther, moins les pistolets, qui ne sont plus de mode'. What is important to remark is however that this is a novel propitiated by the nymph, by the dancing image that allows that fusion of object and form, of speech and phantasm on which 'Le Ricordanze' is formally and thematically structured. This image is a *Pathosformel*, it should be noted, precisely insofar as it presupposes no original, no reconstructable genealogy: 'Warburg's *Pathosformeln*', writes Agamben, are 'hybrids of archetype and phenomenon, first-timeness (*primavoltità*) and repetition'; every image 'is the original; every image constitutes the *archē*', since 'the nymph herself is neither archaic nor contemporary', but rather 'undecidable in regards to diachrony and synchrony, unicity and multiplicity' so that the *Pathosformel*'s function – in the same way as Goethe's *Urphänomenon* – is essentially paradigmatic.[462] In this sense, the mythologem of the nymph, in the definition given by Jung and Kerényi,[463] is a paradigm and a *Pathosformel* that does not shape the poem in a genetic way, but rather by means of analogy and irradiation.[464]

In October 1820 Leopardi enters a passage in the *Zibaldone* in which the theme of fleeting youth is expressed by the verb 'passare', and in which the adjective 'ridenti' is employed for the 'immaginazioni':

> Il giovane non ha passato tutto quello che ne ha, non serve altro che ad attristarlo e stringergli il cuore. le rimembranze della fanciullezza e della prima adolescenza, dei godimenti di quell'età perduti irreparabilmente, delle speranze fiorite, delle immaginazioni ridenti, dei

[462] Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things. On Method*, transl. by Luca D'Isanto with Kevin Attell (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 29.
[463] Carl Gustav Jung and Carl Kerényi, *Science of Mythology. Essays on the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis*, transl. by R.F.C. Hull (London-New York: Routledge, 2002, p. 3.
[464] Cfr. Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, pp. 9-34.

disegni aerei di prosperità futura, di azioni, di vita, di gloria di piacere, tutto svanito. […] Ogn'istante che passa della sua gioventù in questa guisa, gli sembra una perdita irreparabile fatta sopra un'età che per lui non può più tornare (*Zib.* 279-80, 16 October 1820).

This passage is followed by an autobiographical note: 'Il suo divertimento era di passeggiare contando le stelle (e simili)' (*Zib.* 280, 16 October 1820). The semantic constellation of the 'Ricordanze' is here already defined: 'passing' youth finds its illusory, fleeting and ephemeral answer in the act of 'passeggiare contando le stelle', those very stars that in the first line of the 1828 poem would be greeted as the equally ephemeral return of the mythical world of 'illusions'. Twelve years later, in the project for the magazine *Lo Spettatore fiorentino* (1832), Leopardi would reflect on the untranslatability of the French word *flâneur*, embodying a peculiar inclination towards lightness, eclecticism and 'inutilità';[465] in the 'passeggiare' of the 1820 note, however, we already find the same wandering gait, the same light and delaying attitude, through which one can expect to prolong the enchantment. In the same way, the nymph can be seen as an emblem of a wandering and erratic notion of culture, equally made of eclecticism and pure intellectual speculation. Leopardi's acknowledgment of the boundaries of literary tradition, of the ephemerality of modern culture, of the risks of the 'geometrisation' of language and 'affettazione', finds its answer in a paradoxical conjunction of philological density and aerial lightness of speech, of a personal and free reshaping of the conventions of bookmaking and of a final (and anachronistic) acceptance of the challenges of modernity. To some extent, the writing itself of the *Zibaldone* reproduces this wandering pace, this impression of immediacy, this violent reassessing of the practice of culture-making. Tended between the 'library' and Leopardi's own writing, the *Zibaldone* possesses the intermediary nature of the nymph.

[465] *TPP*, pp. 1032-33.

Although quite obvious, it should be remarked how the ‘canti pisano-recanatesi’ are something unexpected and, somehow, miraculous: the renunciation of poetry of the previous years and Leopardi’s turning to the prose of the *Operette* and the civil mission of the two chrestomathies had ended in a global failure, and nobody –even Leopardi himself – could have foreseen this return to poetry. Hence Leopardi’s surprise in writing to his sister, from Pisa, about having, ‘dopo due anni, […] fatto dei versi quest’Aprile; ma versi veramente all’antica, e con quel mio cuore di una volta’, and hence the sense of surprise in the very first line of the ‘Ricordanze’, ‘io non credea’. A precise explanation of happened is of course impossible, yet we cannot but notice how the nymph perfectly embodies the occult power of Anacreon’s poetry that Leopardi had tried to describe ten years before. True poetry produces a *je ne sais quoi* that is incompatible with rational reflection, and that requires what we could call a ‘momentary lapse of reason’ – a moment of beatitude and joy that immediately disappears. What is most interesting is that this feeling is compared to the passing waft of a fresh breeze: the same breeze – we could argue – in which Aby Warburg located the subtly returning presence of antiquity, the air moving the nymph’s clothes and hair, and like the nymph itself, fleeting and ungraspable. Considered from this angle, the nymph/air – a fleeting, ungraspable, suddenly and graciously enchanting presence – is not only the object of poetry, but also the matter of poetry itself, its true and veritable essence. Whenever we make poetry – true poetry – the nymph shines once more, as a light breeze. As Roberto Calasso writes, the nymph

> is the quivering, sparkling, vibrating, *mental matter* of which the simulacrum, the image, the *eídōlon* is made. It is the very stuff of literature. Every time the Nymph shows herself, this divine material that molds itself into epiphanies and enthrones itself in the mind, this power that precedes and upholds the word, begins once again to throb. The moment that power

makes itself manifest, form will follow, adjusting and composing itself with the power's flow.[466]

Surely, for Leopardi the nymphs have departed from the Enlightened world. 'Alla Primavera, o delle Favole antiche' is extremely clear in presenting several of the *imagines* that have been evoked – nymphs and springs, dancing steps, midday and the god Pan, and those encounters of mortals with gods and fauns that troubled Gervase of Gervasio di Tilbury – and in declaring them as illusory:

Già di candide ninfe i rivi albergo,
Placido albergo e specchio
Furo i liquidi fonti. Arcane danze
D'immortal piede i ruinosi gorghi
Scossero e l'ardue selve (oggi romito
Nido de' venti): e il pastorel ch'all'ombre
Meridiane incerte ed al fiorito
Margo adducea de' fiumi
Le sitibonde agnelle, arguto carme
Sonar d'agresti Pani
Udì lungo le ripe; e tremar l'onda
Vide, e stupì, che non palese al guardo
La faretrata Diva
Scendea ne' caldi flutti, e dall'immonda
Polve tergea della sanguigna caccia
Il niveo lato e le verginee braccia. (ll. 23-38)

Still, if the enchantment of 'conta[re] le stelle' is lost once infancy is passed, it is through the reactivation of the 'immagini antiche' that nymphs can be conjured up once more, and in poetry that they can be held still for a brief moment. We should not forget the affinity between nymphs and the Muses,[467] and the form of knowledge through possession that they

[466] Roberto Calasso, *Literature and the Gods*, transl. by Tim Parks (New York: Knopf, 2001), p. 32.
[467] Cf. Larson, *Greek Nymphs*, p. 7: The Muses, Charites, and Horai are groups closely allied to the nymphs, and they fulfil under other names many of the functions otherwise attributed to nymphs (e.g. causing the crops to ripe or producing inspiration)'.

bring:[468] 'il delirio suscitato dalle Ninfe,' writes Calasso, 'nasce […] dall'acqua e da un corpo che ne emerge, così come l'immagine mentale affiora dal continuo della coscienza'.[469] From this it is clear that 'ricordanza' and 'nymph' are, somehow, synonyms. Warburg may have moved from a similar consideration in entitling *Mnemosyne* his 'atlas of images', and equally the 'Ricordanze' can be read, because of its title, as a homage to Mnemosyne, and their underlying ambiguity – that of a 'house of the Ego' haunted by alterity, and of a sweetness confused with sorrow – as a sign of the nymph's bipolar aspect as a 'charming nightmare'.

[468]Calasso, *La follia che viene dalle ninfe*, p. 48.
[469]Ibid., p. 32.

CONCLUSION

FIREFLIES

The laboratory opened with the first page of the *Zibaldone* closes in 1832, without ever being reopened again. As we have said, the role of the *Zibaldone* is *de facto* concluded in September 1829, concurrently with the state of grace from which the 'Ricordanze' arise. Still, for a further four more years, Leopardi keeps adding notes, although always more sporadically, that do not reach three pages in total. On December 4th 1832, in Florence, he eventually adds the last fragment.

Quite curiously, as Franco D'Intino highlights, in that very same year another 'passeggere' makes an appearance within Leopardi's œuvre, as though he were an oblique afterimage of the one who had opened the *Zibaldone,* scared by a dog/wolf at some timeless crossroads.[470] In the 'Dialogo di un venditore di almanacchi e di un passeggere', one of the two *Operette morali* of 1832, we are no longer in the Recanati countryside, although transfigured into the timeless sphere of myth. We are in a modern city, definitely ruled by history and by the time of calendar. In the days immediately preceding New Year's Eve, a travelling seller advertises his 'new almanacs', when he unexpectedly meets an unnamed figure of *flâneur*. The two begin to talk.

The dialogue is suffused by a sad irony as well as by a sort of compassion. The new year will be good, the seller replies to the wanderer's urging questions: still, it will not look like

[470] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, p. 204.

any of the past ones, since no one of them has after all been happy. Life is beautiful, 'Cotesto si sa', but if obliged to live again the past years, under the condition of 'rifare la vita né più né meno, con tutti i piaceri e dispiaceri' that one has experienced, no one, not even a prince, would accept. 'Oh che vita vorreste voi dunque?', the wanderer eventually asks. Thus answers the seller:

Venditore. Vorrei una vita così, come Dio me la mandasse, senz'altri patti.
Passeggere. Una vita a caso, e non saperne altro avanti, come non si sa dell'anno nuovo?
V. Appunto.
P. Così vorrei ancor io se avessi a rivivere, e così tutti. […] Quella vita ch'è una cosa bella, non è la vita che si conosce, ma quella che non si conosce; non la vita passata, ma la futura. Coll'anno nuovo, il caso incomincerà a trattar bene voi e me e tutti gli altri, e si principierà la vita felice. Non è vero?
V. Speriamo.
P. Dunque mostratemi l'almanacco più bello che avete.
V. Ecco, illustrissimo. Cotesto vale trenta soldi.
P. Ecco trenta soldi.
V. Grazie, illustrissimo: a rivederla. Almanacchi, almanacchi nuovi; lunari nuovi.

There is much *charity* in this final answer of the wanderer, who interrupts the conversation and purchases an almanac that he knows to be completely useless – charity, I mean, in the fullest sense of the Greek word *Charis*. In the wanderer's answer there is lightness, grace, ambiguity. At the same time, however, there is also a sort of disinterested love, which brings the passenger to softly play with ironic rhetorical questions, so not to destroy the seller's poor illusions ('E pure la vita è una cosa bella. Non è vero?'; 'Coll'anno nuovo […] si principierà la vita felice. Non è vero?'). In being a Socratic figure, like many other characters of the *Operette*, the wanderer decides however (unlike Plato's Socrates) to halt, and not to push his maieutic interrogation to the extreme.His purpose is not to reveal the truth but only to make some ambiguous allusions that the seller is unable to grasp, as if momentarily playing for dispelling boredom. This corresponds to Leopardi's notion of 'mezza filosofia', elaborated in

the *Zibaldone* since 1821 (*Zib.* 520-22, 17 January 1821): unlike the strict interdependence of 'enlightenment' and human happiness postulated by the *philosophes*, for Leopardi – as it will be for Nietzsche – the full and absolute cognition of the truth is independent, and even opposed, to the well-being of human creatures.[471] One should therefore move in some intermediary zone, in which knowledge would not correspond to a 'slaughter of the illusions': man, as Leopardi synthetises in 1820, 'ha bisogno di credenze' (*Zib.* 437, 22 December 1820), and Voltaire's ideal of virtue as 'benevolence for your neighbour' (*bienfaisance envers le prochain*)[472] can therefore sometimes coincide with cheating him. This deeply ethical choice, which recuperates the Christian notion of a disinterested pity for humanity and its miseries, animates the respectful, although ironic, answer of the wanderer.

Once the dialogue is over, both wanderer and seller go their own way. Theirs has been a momentary and fleeting encounter: the only kind of encounter that a big city can allow, as Walter Benjamin showed well in analysing Baudelaire's 'A une passante'. Every being passes, Leopardi suggests, and the fate of everything (especially in modern life) is nothing but ephemerality. As we have seen, in April 1827, Leopardi connected the fate of human beings to that of modern books, both doomed to a fleeting life: by recuperating an ancient image, already present in Homer and Pindar,[473] he stated that 'Noi siamo veramente oggidì passeggeri e pellegrini sulla terra: veramente caduchi~~.~~: esseri di un giorno: la mattina in fiore, la sera appassiti, ~~:~~o secchi: soggetti anche a sopravvivere alla propria fama, e più longevi che la memoria di noi' (*Zib.* 4270, 2 April 1827). What is the form of survival that such ephemeral and frail creatures can expect?

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[471] D'Intino, *L'immagine della voce*, pp. 101-105.
[472] Voltaire, 'Vertu', in Id., *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1764), ed. by René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion, 1964), pp. 373-74, p. 373.
[473] A detailed analysis of this image in Leopardi is in Lorenzo Polato, *Il sogno di un'ombra* (Venice: Marsilio 2007).

In the *Vita abbozzata di Silvio Sarno*, Leopardi had drafted a sort of micro-narration in which the constellation of 'Le Ricordanze' was already, somehow, present:

giardino presso alla casa del guardiano, io era malinconichiss. e mi posi a una finestra che metteva sulla piazzetta ec. due giovanotti sulla gradinata della chiesa abbandonata ec. erbosa ec. sedevano scherzando sotto al lanternone ec. si sballottavano ec. comparisce la prima lucciola ch'io vedessi in quell'anno ec. uno dei due s'alza gli va addosso ec. io domandava fra me misericordia alla poverella l'esortava ad alzarsi ec, ma la colpì e gittò a terra e tornò all'altro ec. intanto la figlia del cocchiere ec. alzandosi da cena e affacciatasi alla finestra per lavare un piattello nel tornare dice a quei dentro = stanotte piove da vero. Se vedeste che tempo. Nero come un cappello. = e poco dopo sparisce il lume di quella finestra ec. intanto la lucciola era risorta ec. avrei voluto ec. ma quegli se n'accorse tornò = porca buzzarona = un'altra botta la fa cadere già debole com'era ed egli col piede ne fa una striscia lucida fra la polvere ec. e poi ec. finchè la cancella. […] sento una dolce voce di donna che non conoscea né vedea ec.[474]

Teresa, the coachman's daughter, shows herself at the window, whose light is suddenly dissolved in the night 'Ner[a] come un cappello'. Another light, that of the firefly, is stifled in the meantime, murdered by an act of meaningless brutality. The two elements are inextricably linked the one each other in a sort of short-circuit that encompasses a window, a feminine voice and a suddenly faded light. A single connection links Teresa and the firefly, in both being ephemeral creatures who are doomed to fall.

Not by chance, the Teresa appearing in the *Silvio Sarno* is plausibly the first embryo of the Silvia of 1828, as well as the firefly is recuperated as an emblem of lost innocence in the 'Ricordanze' ('E la lucciola errava appo le siepi / E in su l'aiuole', ll. 14-15). The sources that convey to Leopardi the literary image of the firefly –Roberti's Aesopian fable *La lucciola*, Gessner's idyll *La serenata*, Erasmus Darwin's *Amori delle piante* – show deep textual associations with 'Le Ricordanze', coagulating around the firefly the ideas of ephemerality, of

[474] Leopardi, *Scritti e frammenti autobiografici*, pp. 108-11.

an intermittent and feeble splendour, of an erratic movement and that of fall.[475] In the same way, Teresa/Silvia and Nerina (as we have seen) wander, pass and fall: like fireflies, which feebly shine in the darkest night.

Now, as George Didi-Huberman highlights, the falling of the nymph does not mean disappearance, but rather an oblique and imperceptible form of survival.[476] This is an aspect that is not immediately perceivable at a first glance, as it was not, in 1819, for Leopardi, who had only watched he way he murdered firefly became a 'striscia lucida', soon to be deleted by the foot of the young man. This is probably why the 'falling of the firefly' haunts modernity as a returning motif, embodying, just as it had been in Leopardi, the beauty that the so-called 'progress' (or the mere biological process of becoming adults) has dissolved. Moving from Pier Paolo Pasolini's famous *Articolo delle lucciole* (1975), Didi-Huberman has explored the way the image of the disappearance of fireflies from modern countryside hides an 'apocalyptic' and anti-modern move, a bitter nostalgia for the past that bends onto the ideal of an archaic and lost innocence.[477] The firefly, as in the Montemorello square of the *Silvio Sarno*, is the privileged victim of the most ferocious brutality, which for Pasolini has definitely become the main feature of society.

Still, for Didi-Huberman, the firefly embodies a possibility of resistance and survival that Pasolini's (or Giorgio Agamben's) apocalyptic tones seem to underestimate. This resistance is not grounded in continuity and durability but rather in the very features themselves of the firefly as an ephemeral creature: its irregular and intermittent light, its fleeting life, its unperceivable smallness. Like Warburg's nymph, the firefly symbolyses a fragmentary and

[475] Cf. D'Intino's corresponding note in ibid., pp. 110-11 n.203.
[476] Didi-Huberman, *Ninfa moderna*, p. 15.
[477] Georges Didi-Huberman, *Survivance des lucioles* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2009).

wandering form of knowledge, which survives precisely because of its ephemeral nature, and which may give a hint for 'organising pessimism' in a political way.

In this work, I have tried to show exactly how Leopardi turns his bitter statement of the radically ephemeral nature of human life and culture into a productive employment of that very same ephemerality as the only resource left to moderns. The *Zibaldone* as a 'non-book', the recuperation of the Greek genre of *hypomnēmata* as a device for reassessing the splitting of post-Enlightenment subjectivity, the dialogue with the sources as embodied by quotations and its direction towards direct writing projects, the idea of a post-revolutionary political book and (eventually) the use of philological skills in order to retrace an alchemy of the charming power of poetry, are as many steps of an experience of shock that aims to turn into direct (although unperceivable) action. By fully acknowledging the fracture that has divided the modern subject from a both historical and autobiographical past, the *Zibaldone* is constructed as a laboratory in motion, in which memory, the past and the library produce a 'firefly-like' – namely, intermittent and rhizomatic – modality of knowledge.

The direct experience of anamnesis that rules the so-called 'canti pisano-recanatesi' (partially 'A Silvia', and fully 'Le Ricordanze) engenders a deviation in this process, that turns into another form of writing. In this new experience of textual production, the laboratory has become unnecessary: the apprenticeship is complete, and the originality and skilful naïveté theorised from a philosophical point of view have been reached, outside the subject's control, in the form of a poetic speech that is immediately concretised into the written page. At this stage, the *hypomnēmaton* must be needs left behind, while both an individual and cultural *mnēme* takes directly its place.

As we have seen, the *Zibaldone* had been opened by the conjuration of a timeless sphere of origin, embodied by the 'immagine antica': the '*Arkhē*,' in other words, as Jacques Derrida

summarises, 'there where things *commence* – physical, historical, or ontological principle'.[478] The *hypomnēmaton*-like form of writing had hence systematically tried to retrace this *original* space through an archaeological paradigm aimed at recuperating an 'antiquity' that was both individual and collective. We should never forget, Derrida writes, the 'Greek distinction between *mnēmē* or *anamnēsis* on the one hand, and *hypomnēma* on the other'.[479] The *Zibaldone* is a 'hypomnesic' form of writing and therefore belongs to the sphere of the archive.[480] This sphere corresponds to an archaeological paradigm, in the same way in which Sigmund Freud – or his literary double Norbert Hanold, the main character of Jensens' *Gradiva* – used to move:

> Freud was incessantly tempted to redirect the original interest he had for the psychic archive toward archaeology […]. The scene of excavation, the theatre of archaeological digs are the preferred places of this brother to Hanold. Each time he wants to teach the topology of the archives, that is to say, of what ought to exclude or forbid the return to the origin, this lover of stone figurines proposes archaeological parables.[481]

Still, there may come an instant ('A moment and not a process') that 'does not belong to the laborious deciphering of the archive'.[482] This is

> the nearly ecstatic instant Freud dreams of, when the very success of the dig must sign the effacement of the archivist: *the origin then speaks by itself*. The *arkhē* appears in the nude, without archive. It presents itself and comments on itself by itself. 'Stones talk!' In the present. *Anamnēsis* withouth *hypomnēsis*! The archaeologist has succeeded in making the archive no longer serve any function. *It comes to efface itself*, it becomes transparent or unessential so as to let the *origin* present itself in person. Live, without mediation and without delay. Without even the memory of a translation, once the intense work of translation has succeeded.

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[478] Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', *Diacritics* 25, 2 (1995), pp. 9-63, p. 9.
[479] Ibid., p. 14.
[480] Ibid.
[481] Ibid., p. 58.
[482] Ibid.

The ‘canti pisano-recanatesi’ are subsequently the ecstatic moment that does not belong to the sphere of archaeology and of the archive, and that therefore dissolves the *Zibaldone*-laboratory since origin (the ‘immagine antica’) speaks at that point by itself. The same sphere of origin that the *Zibaldone* had obliquely conjured at its initial threshold also concludes it, outside the text, thereby emptying its significance. The *arkhē*-‘immagine antica’, reactivated in the moment of anamnesis, is now made visible without mediation: poetry does not need any laboratory any more, by embodying in itself the very power of speech. Exactly like in Freud-Jensen, this ‘ecstatic instant’ is epitomised by the fleeting footstep of the walking nymph, Nerina or Gradiva:

> [Freud] wants to exhume a more archaic *impression*, he wants to exhibit a more archaic *imprint* than the one around which the other archaeologists of all kinds bustle, those of literature and those of classical objective science, an imprint which each time is singular, an impression which is almost no longer an archive but which almost confuses itself with the pressure of the footstep which leaves its still-living mark on a substrate, a surface, a place of origin. When the step is still one with the subjectile. In the instant when the printed archive is yet to be detached from the primary impression in its singular, irreproducible, and archaic origin. In the instant when the imprint is yet to be left, abandoned by the pressure of the impression. In the instant of the pure auto-affection, in the indistinction of the active and the passive, of a touching and the touched. An archive which would in sum confuse itself with the *arkhē*, with the origin of which it is only the *type*, the *typos*, the iterable letter or character. An archive without archive, where, suddenly indiscernible from the impression of its imprint, Gradiva's footstep speaks by itself! Now this is exactly what Hanold dreamed of in his disenchanted archaeologist's desire, in the moment when he awaited the coming of the ‘mid-day ghost’.[483]

The poetry of the ‘canti pisano-recanatesi’ appears therefore as the place where memory and the past can be freed from post-Enlightenment paradigms of historicity, which have made the understanding of the past as a ‘lifeless archaeological intuition (*eine leblose*

[483] Ibid., p. 61.

archäologische Anschauung)':

> when the dead awake (*die Toten wachten auf, und Pompeji fing an, wieder zu leben*), Hanold understands everything. He understands why he had travelled […]. He begins to *know* (*wissen*) what he did not then know […]. And this knowledge, this comprehension, this deciphering of the interior desire to decipher which drove him on to Pompeii, all of this comes back to him in an act of memory (*Erinnerung*). He recalls that he came to see if he could find her traces, the traces of Gradiva's footsteps (*ob er hier Spuren von ihr auffinden könne*).[484]

In Nerina's footsteps, in the act itself of 'passare', the erratic movement of the firefly is crystallised and made active again, turning into a direct choice for the *present* that eschews the archive-*hypomnēmaton*. Not by chance, Leopardi's future poetry, notably with the 'Aspasia cycle', chooses the present as its dimension:[485] the fleeting present in which the wanderer and the almanac seller can meet for a moment and maybe share a dubious (although potentially true, who knows?) confidence in the future. This choice of living in the present, by choosing the firefly's intermittent light as a form of resistance, metamorphoses the Christian idea of wandering and transitory human experience into the *flâneur*-like movement of the 'passeggere'. Likewise the ideal of *Charis* turns into an ironic benevolence that is an ultimate act of love for humanity, unburdened from the Catholic heaviness of Leopardi's religious education.

In the *Silvio Sarno* passage of the firefly, the 'prima lucciola ch'io vedessi in quell'anno' is the only light when everything is 'Nero come un cappello'. Teresa could not know it, but her expression was to be employed by Leopardi decades later, in order to describe human experience as a whole and to retrace in an equally transitory shade of light the only resource

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[484] Ibid.

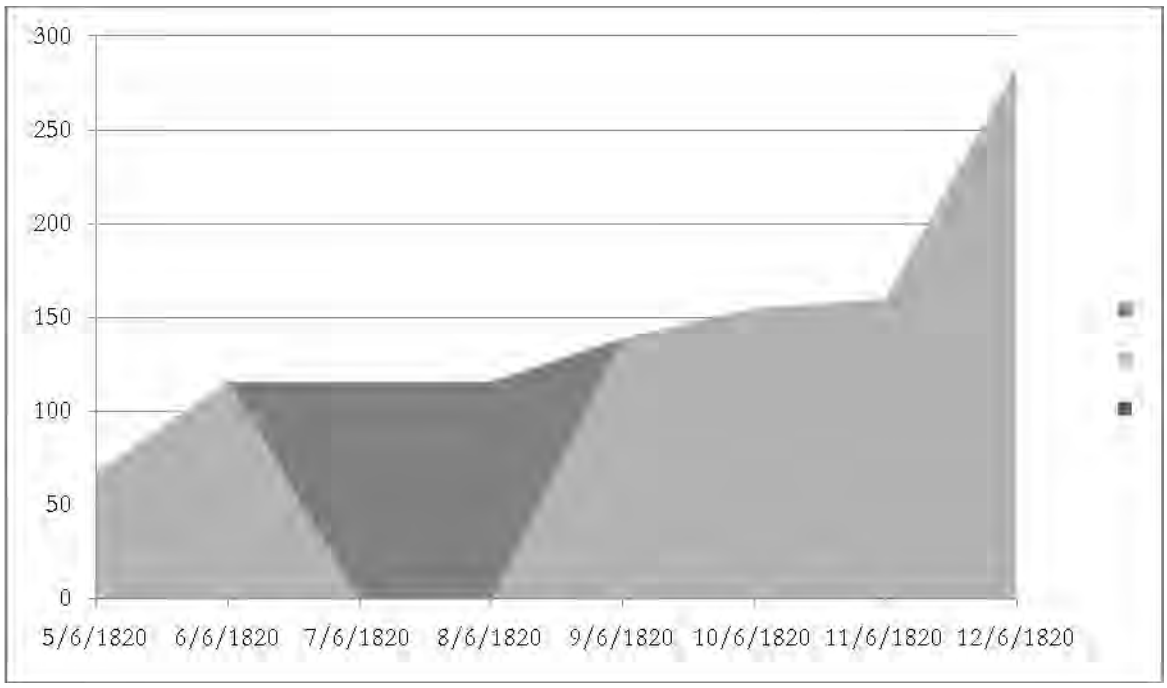
[485] Cf. Margaret Brose, 'Posthumous Poetics: Leopardi's *A se stesso'*, *Lingua e stile*, 24, 1 (1989), pp. 89-114.

left to the human race – with nonchalance and a sort of aristocratic disdain:

[…] Che se d'affetti
Orba la vita, e di gentili errori,
È note senza stelle a mezzo il verno,
Già del fato mortale a me bastante
E conforto e vendetta è che su l'erba
Qui neghittoso immobile giacendo,
Il mar la terra e il ciel miro e sorrido. ('Aspasia', ll. 106-12)

APPENDIXES

FIG. I



(light grey corresponds to days when Leopardi actually puts references in the *Zibaldone*)

FIG. II

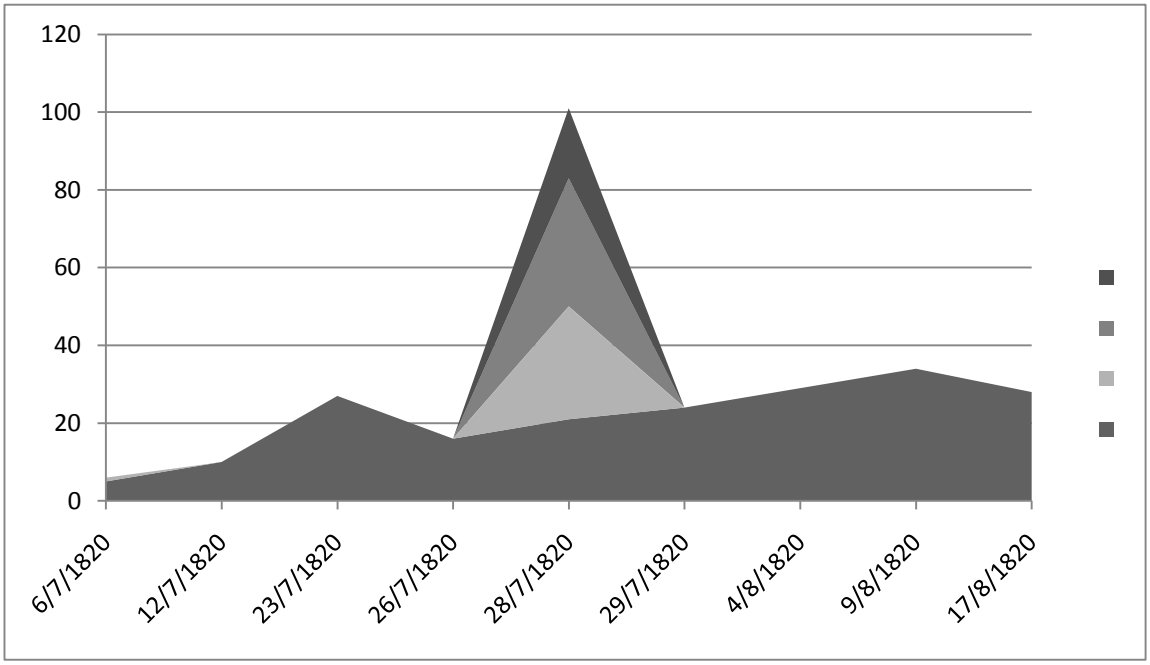

120
100
80
60
40
20
0
6/7/1820
12/7/1820
23/7/1820
26/7/1820
28/7/1820
29/7/1820
4/8/1820
9/8/1820
17/8/1820

TABLE I

Paraphrase with or without textual reference	‘Onde Aviano raccontando una favoletta dice che’ (1) ‘quel Giove accennante col capo e scuotente l'Olimpo; quel Nettuno che in quattro passi traversa provincie, quel grido di Marte ferito che pareggia il grido di diecimila combattenti e d'improvviso atterrisce ambedue gli eserciti, Greco e troiano; (Il. 5.) quella caduta dello stesso Dio che disteso occupa sette iugeri di terreno; .(Il. 21. 407.) […]’ (13) ‘Cercava Longino (nel fine del Sublime del trattato del Sublime) perchè al suo tempo ci fosse tanta scarsezza di anime grandi e portava per ragione parte la fine delle repubbliche e della libertà, parte l’avarizia, la lussuria e l’ignavia’ (21) ‘come quando Luciano nel Ζεὺς ἐλεγχόμενος paragona gli Dei sospesi al filo fuso della Parca ai pesci[olini] sospesi alla canna del pescatore’ (41)[486] ‘Voce e canto dell’erbe rugiadose in sul mattino ringrazianti e lodanti Iddio, e così delle piante ec. Sanazzaro ib.’ (55) ‘Nella gran battaglia dell'Isso, Dario collocò i soldati greci mercenari avanti nella fronte della battaglia, (Arriano l. 2. c. 98. sectz. 9. Curzio l. 3. c. 9. sectz. 2.) Alessandro i suoi mercenari greci proprio nella coda. (Arriano c. 9. sez. 5.) Curiosa e notabilissima differenza e da pronosticare da questo solo l’esito della battaglia. Perchè èera chiaro che tutta la confidenza dei Persiani stava in quei 30m. greci, e pure qu eran greci anche i mercenari d'Alessandro (Arriano c. 9. sez. 7.) ed egli li poneva alla coda’ (62) ‘Notano (v. Roberti favola 62. nota) che le femmine degli uccelli generalmente son più meno belle dei maschi e se ne fanno maraviglia’ (67)
Allusion without quotation	‘se è vero quel dice che dice il Parini nella Oraz. della poesia’ (2) ‘chi non vede adesso che è cosa ridicola e affettatissima il lamento d’Olimpia ec. nell’Ariosto, quello d’Erminia ec. nel Tasso?’ (5) ‘quella mediocrità che riprende Orazio’ (10)

[486] The title is a later addition, written over the text. Equally, in a first draft Leopardi had written ‘pesci’, only later transformed into ‘pesciolini’. He must evidently have checked the passage in a second time, althugh without indicating the bibliographical reference.

	‘quelle tante parole dell’Alfieri p.e. spiemontizzare ec. ec.’ (12) ‘Luciano ne’ Dial. de’ morti; Ercole e Diogene; usa la parola ἄνταν̓δρον’ (12) ‘come il Gravina nella ragion poet.’ (16) ‘si veda nel migliore e più celebre pezzo di del Bossuet, quello in fine dell’Oraz. di Condèé che effetto fa l’introduz. di se stesso, al qual pezzo io paragono quello di Cic. nell’a Oraz. pro Milone Miloniana […]’ (30) ‘Nella quistione se debba dire be ce de ec. o bi ec. e però abbiccì o abbeccè della quale v. il Manni Lez. di ling. Toscana […]’ (30) ‘V. Luciano fra le altre op. nel trattato De merdcede conductis’ (31) ‘Quello che dice il Metastasio negli Estratti della poet. d’Aristot. il Gravina nel Trattato della tragedia dove parla del numero cap. 26 […] è vero’ (32) ‘[…] ogni volta che [Monti] o per iscelta come nel Bardo, o per necessità ed incidenza come nella Basvilliana è portato ad esprimer cose affettuose’ (36) ‘di ciò mi sovvengono (verbo usato in questo significato dal Tasso) 4. ragioni’ (39) ‘se è vero quello che dice il Calsabigi nella lettera all’Alfieri, (41) ‘come trovo incidentemente e finissimam. notato anche nella 2.da lett. del Magalotti contro gli A Ateis Atei’ (43) ‘del che v. Elladio appo il Meursio’ (44) ‘quello che dicono Plutarco quando nel principio di Demostene, e Longino dove parla di Cic.’ (44) ‘un esempio recente di questi un un martire che potendo fuggir la morte, non volle, si può vedere nel Bartoli, Missione al gran Mogol’ (44) ‘come nota l’aAlgarotti’ (54) ‘il Sanazzaro nell’aArcadia prosa 9. ad imitazione di quella favola, s’io non erro, circa Esiodo’ (55) ‘come dice Verter ec.’ (56)

	‘vedi il v la verissima osservazione di Verter lettera 5 sul fine della lettera 50’ (57) ‘Una facezia del genere […] è quella degli Antiocheni che dicevano dell’imp. Giuliano che aveva una barba da farne corde, (Iulian. in Misopogone)’ (58) ‘Una bella e notabile similitud. è quella dell'Alamanni nel Girone canto 17. o 18 di un mastino e un lupo che si scontrino a caso (così dice) per una selva, o ec. e così si a la loro sorpresa scambievole e timore e rabbia subita e azzuffamento: come pur quella del Martelli (non so quale mi ricordo quale) di una villanella cercante funghi e corrente dove vede biancheggiare una foglia secca ec. prendendola p. un fungo’ (60) ‘v. quello che dice Seneca nell della voce, analogia’ (62) ‘parole ora risibili p.e. frappare per battere, vengianza nell’Alamanni Girone, più volte, e senza necessità di rima, e parecchie altre di questo andare nello stesso poema’ (62) ‘Della distinzione del ridicolo in quello che consiste in cose e quello che in parole […] vedi il lCosta della elocuzione p. 70 e segg.’ (63) ‘A quel pensiero dell'Algarotti che è nel t. 8 delle sue op. Cremona Manini 1778-1784. p. 96. si può aggiungere il καλοκἀγαθος dei greci’ (64) ‘come puoi vedere nei dettagli che dà il Barthelemy sulle Termopile’ (68)
Bibliographical reference[487]	‹V. Dati pittori ed. Siena 1795. p. 57. 66› (2) ‘V. Martignoni ec. Annali di scienze e lettere n. 8. p. 252-54.’ (7) ‘V. Quintiliano l. 10. c. ii.’ (8) ‘V. Camper Diss. sur le beau physique’ (8) ‘V. Martignoni Annal. di Scienz. e lett. n. 8. p. 245. nota ove anche della musica francese e italiana.’ (8) ‘Borgno Diss. sopra il i Sepolcri diel Foscolo oMilano 1813. p. 86. nota) (i.)’ (13)

[487] The reference to Montesquieu on p. 51 is a later addition, as we will see later.

	‘come in quel frammento di Filemone Comico appo il Vettori Var. Lect. 1. 18. c. 17’ (41) ‘v. il Du Cange’ (42) ‘v. le lettere premesse aux principes discutés de la société Hébreeo-Capucine ectc.’ (51) ‘Per un’Ode lamentevole sull’Italia può servire quel pensiero di Foscolo nell’Ortis lett. 19 e 20 Febbraio 187 1799. Nap. p. 200. ediz. di Napoli [1811]’ (58)
General reference without explicit example	‘I francesi hanno certe esagerazioni familiari così usitate che sono vere frasi proprie della lingua […]. Nessun altro fu pi sì ricordevole del benefizio. (Aucun ne fut ec.).’ (9) ‘Non credo che siano molto da ascoltare quelli che credono che certi passi sublimi della Bibbia avanzino ogni altro passo sublime di qualsivoglia autore; e lo provano con la grandezza materiale dell’immagine; p.e. dicono, il misurare le acque colla mano e pesare i cieli colla palma, (Is. 410. 12.)[…]’ (13) ‘basta osservare i luoghi della Bibbia dove non si parla di Dio nè di cose affatto sublimi, come p.e. tutta la Cantica dove anzi si parla di amore e cose delicate’ (13) ‘Nelle poesie del Monti (specialmente nelle Cantiche) sono osservabili la bellezza novità efficacia delle imagini […]’ (13-14) ‘Cicerone era il predicatore delle illusioni. Vedete le Filippiche principalmente, ma poi atutte le altre Orazioni sue politiche; sempre sta in persuadere i Romani a operare illusamente […]’ (22) ‘come nelle Cerimonie del Maffei commedia piena di vero a e antico ridicolo’ (42) ‘come il Saint-Pierre negli studi della natura lo Chatoeaubriand ec.’ (53) ‘dDante che con due parole desta un’immagine lascia molto a fare alla fantasia’ (57) ‘Nelle favole del Pignotti (e forse in altre ancora) per la più parte, è svanito il fine diella favola’ (67)

Quotation without reference	Dice Bacone da Verulamio che tutte le facoltà ridotte ad arte steriliscono' (39) 'pax pax et non erat pax, ma non so se così veram. dica S. Paolo,) o qual altro Scrittor sacro' (47) 'Canto l'armi pietose ec.' (52) 'come anche l'altra immagine del Sanazzaro, ivi, di un popolo paese molto strano, dove nascon le genti tutte nere, come matura oliva, e correvi sì basso il Sole, che si potrebbe di leggiero, se non , cuocesse, con la mano toccare' (55) 'tout home qui pense est un être corrompu, dice il Rousseau' (56) 'cruda deo viridisque sencectus, dice Virgilio divinamente' (68) 'Invenies alium si te hic fastidit Alexis' (69)

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